

Asian Water-bird Census

What is the issue?

- Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) that surveys sites across 23 countries (including Australia) was recently conducted.
- The trends highlight the dangers facing water birds and their habitats.

How does the migratory bird landscape look?

- ✓ Every winter, the thousands of wetlands that dot India, transform from muddy slips of water to harsh bird parties.
- ✓ Ducks and geese from Ladakh and Tibet swim through aquatic vegetation, and wader on half-submerged banks, and 'oriental darters' spear the water for fish.
- ✓ While the data for the current census isn't out yet, the census by energetic citizens over the years has pointed to some clear trends.
- ✓ India has the biggest species diversity among the regions sampled by AWC, tallying to a mean figure of 1.8 million water birds over 300 sites.
- ✓ Chilika Lake in Odisha alone supports a staggering half-a-million water birds.
- ✓ Most of these water birds are migratory and winter in India's wetlands.
- ✓ For instance, the bar-headed goose, breeds in Mongolia, Tibet and Kyrgyzstan and crosses the Himalayas and Hindu Kush to reach India.

Are the bird numbers declining?

- There has been a noticeable decline in several species visiting India over the years, which is concerning.
- The Oriental darter (long necked), which was once a common sight in many wetlands, numbered just 4,000 in the sites that got surveyed currently.

- The Indian skimmer (with a bright orange bill) — which can ‘skim’ over water to snap up fish, were counted to be just 300.
- Sarus crane, the world’s tallest flying bird, often found in pairs or small groups, accounted for as little as just about 100 birds over several years.
- These are mainly because, the wetlands, which are cherished equally by local residents, and birdwatchers are in peril.

What is the status of wetlands in India?

- The National Wetland Atlas, prepared by the ISRO in 2011, found that India has over 2 lakh wetlands, most which aren’t notified as such.
- They thus run the risk of being destroyed and many court cases across the country reflect the precarious existence of wetlands.
- The iconic East Kolkata Wetlands, which is also designated ‘Ramsar wetland’ of international importance, is being steadily eaten up by construction.
- Like in many cities, this wetland too is becoming a sewage canal, and a case has been filed with the National Green Tribunal (NGT).
- In Delhi-NCR, birdwatchers have filed a case to protect the Basai wetland, which is fed by sewage but continues to harbour almost 300 bird species.
- Similar cases were also filed to conserve Najafgarh jheel (a riverine wetland).
- Also, Sukhna Lake in Chandigarh, Deepor Beel in Guwahati, and the lakes in Nainital, are all choked by sewage, garbage and encroachment.
- Notably, the new “Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017” has made matters worse as it denounces manmade water bodies as wetlands.
- The previous rules had stated that manmade water bodies like tanks and salt pans are also wetlands (these do support bird populations in reality).

How does the future look?

- The census clearly indicates that several water bird populations in the Central Asian flyway (comprising migratory routes) are declining.
- Urgent national and regional action is needed to reverse this trend and hundreds of wetlands in India are in need of identification and notification.
- India was an active participant in the 2017 Conference of the Parties to the “Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals”.
- It even offered to initiate consultations for the creation of a “Central Asian Flyway Action Plan” to Conserve Migratory Waterbirds and their Habitats.
- The vision of the action plan is to reduce threats to waterfowl and conserve wetlands while also tackling threats such as power lines and windmills.

Source: The Hindu

New Agreements between India-UAE

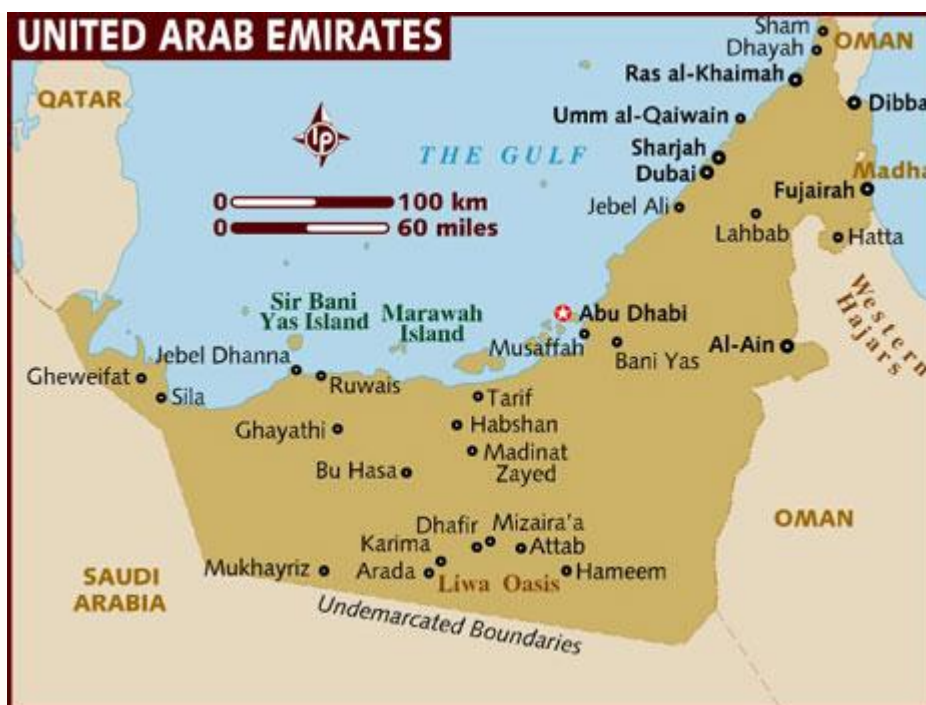
Why in news?

India and UAE has signed five new agreements related to energy sector, railways, manpower and financial services.

What are the agreements signed?

1. A MoU between the Indian Consortium (OVL, BPRL & IOCL) and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) was signed for the acquisition of a 10% participating interest in the Abu Dhabi's offshore.
2. To cooperate in the field of manpower, India and the UAE signed a MoU that aims to institutionalise the collaborative administration of contractual employment of Indian workers in the Gulf country.

3. A MoU for technical cooperation in railways was also signed between the two sides, it aims at cooperation in infrastructure sector especially railways.
4. To deepen bilateral cooperation in the field of finance, a MoU between Bombay Stock Exchange and Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange was also signed.
5. A MoU between the Government of Jammu and Kashmir and DP World was also signed to establish multi-modal logistics park and hub in Jammu comprising warehouses and specialised storage solutions.



What are the prospects of these agreements?

- The concession on oil will be for 40 years from 2018 to 2057, with 60% of the participating interest will be retained by ADNOC and remaining 30% will be awarded to other international oil companies.
- This is the first Indian Investment in upstream oil sector of UAE, transforming the traditional buyer-seller relationship to a long-term investor relationship.

- Labour related MoUs will end the existing malpractices, combat trafficking and organise collaborative programs for education and awareness of contractual workers.
- Railway related MoU will facilitate development of joint projects, knowledge sharing, joint research, and technology transfer and envisages formation of a Joint Working Group.
- The financial MoU will enhance cooperation between both the countries in financial services industry and facilitate investment in financial markets by investors from both the countries.

Source: The Hindu

Theatre Olympics in India

What is the issue?

- Starting in Greece in 1995, Theatre Olympics fest has since been held across the world every few years since 1995.
- The 2018 edition will be hosted by India (the first time in the country) and Preparations for the same are on in full swing.

What is Theatre Olympics?

Greek theatre director 'Theodoros Terzopoulos' conceptualised Theatre Olympics and it was held for the first time in Delphi, Greece.

The idea was to gather the best theatre practitioners from around the world and create a forum for exchange — of ideas, cultures, forms and practices.

It was also to be another kind of exchange, between eras, trying to find a continuum between the past, present and future of theatre.

The current edition in India is being organised by the National School for Drama (NSD), which is an autonomous body under the ministry of culture.

This event will see numerous Indian and foreign drama troops performing across multiple cities over the course of the fest.

How has Indian theatre fared historically?

- ✓ India has had a rich theatre history as early as 200 BCE and saw the likes of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti, Sudraka and Bhasa producing masterpieces.
- ✓ Simultaneously, there is an equally fertile landscape produced tribal, subaltern and folk theatre that morphed and thrived down the ages.
- ✓ The anti-colonial theatre of the mid-19th century brought in the draconian Dramatic Performances (Prevention) Act of 1876.
- ✓ Later, the pre-Independence Left movement generated vital critical energy through the Indian Peoples Theatre Association.
- ✓ But our long theatrical tradition hasn't been sufficiently exhibited to our own people and the "Indian theatre needs a push, to become vibrant again.
- ✓ Thus, the Olympics being envisaged is not just about bringing international theatre to India but also about bringing Indian theatre to Indians.

Is the initiative massive?

- ❖ The itinerary for the program looks huge with 465 productions from 35 countries in 51 days across 17 cities.
- ❖ Each production will get up to Rs.1.5 lakh per show besides travel, accommodation and other costs.
- ❖ There is also technical support such as sets, lighting, sound and subtitles along with photography, videography and publications.

- ❖ Apart from the main plays, there will be ambient performances — tribal, folk, street, puppetry, magic shows — before each show.
- ❖ In total, the fest is expected to present roughly 35,000 artistes across India.

What are the concerns?

1. There is considerable concern on how the festival will respond to political dissent, Dalit concerns or other controversial topics.
2. Notably, there is no censorship and a mere guideline against “nudity and anti-nationalism” has been provided.
3. Plays were selected through a two-tier process and most plays were submitted on DVD, many of which were of poor quality (due to small regional groups).
4. The sheer numbers and content diversity often hindered the review process, and also language and cultural barriers got aggravated by distance.
5. The review format also tends to neglect thoughtful, text-based plays and also results in loss of context and local traditions, which are lost in translation.
6. Notably, Germany has a hefty theatre culture, and each play usually comes with a booklet that gives an overview of the contextual setting and its customs.

What can be hoped out of the festival?

- Theatre Olympic is a massive effort, but mere massiveness alone can do little to help theatre, although it need not be dismissed completely.
- This event can potentially become the very first theatre census conducted in the country, and can serve as an invaluable research project.
- There will be Catalogues, brochures, papers, videos, a documentary, and live streaming of the recordings of thousands of hours of performances.

- The extensive documentation planned around the Olympics, thus, stands to become its single most significant legacy.
- This will also help in increasing networking of various drama teams and provide the much needed oxygen for the currently struggling art form.
- This event will also boost awareness and therefore theatre infrastructure.

Source: The Hindu

Microsoft HoloLens-Augmented Reality

- Augmented reality headsets -HoloLens can help doctors 'see through' organs and tissues in the operating theatre,
- The advancement improves the outcome of reconstructive surgery for patients.
- The approach can help surgeons locate and reconnect key blood vessels during reconstructive surgery, which could improve outcomes for patients
- Augmented reality (AR) is a **live direct or indirect view** of a physical, real-world environment whose elements are "augmented" by computer-generated perceptual information.
- Other Fields of applications are: Archaeology, Architecture, Education, commerce.

Transformation of aspirational districts program

- Fourteen districts from Northeast have been identified for "Aspirational Development" under the program.
- "Transformation of Aspirational Districts" programme is under the aegis of NITI Aayog, under the guidance of Prime minister of India.
- The main factors determining whether the given district is backward or not will be based on sectors like health, nutrition, education and agriculture.
- For each district, a four-tier supervisory mechanism has been put in place with a Central Nodal Officer from the Union Government, a State Nodal Officer from concerned State Govt, a District Nodal Officer / District Collector and a Union Minister-in-charge.

National Meet on Grassroot Informatics

- National Informatics Centre (NIC) is organizing a three-day National Meet on Grassroot Informatics- VIVID 2018.
- It is a platform for knowledge sharing which provides for interaction of officials and leveraging on each other's experience and best practices.
- The Theme for VIVID 2018 is **"Cyber Security and Innovation"**.
- The National Meet will cover the Emerging Technologies (Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning & Big Data Analytics), Cyber Threats & Counter Measures, Critical Information Infrastructure protection (NIC-CERT).

Source: PIB, The Hindu, Business Standard

Modi reiterates support for Palestine

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Palestine said support for the Palestinian cause is a continuing thread in India's foreign policy and hoped for an early realisation of a "sovereign, independent Palestine living in a peaceful environment".

After bilateral talks, the two sides signed six agreements worth around \$50 million, including one for setting up a \$30 million super speciality hospital in Beit Sahur. Agreements were also signed to build schools, a diplomatic training institute and a woman's empowerment and training centre.

STATE-AP

Centre to give boats, fuel for coastal security

The 973-km coastline in Andhra Pradesh will soon have better mechanism to ensure coastal security.

The Central government has come forward to give special assistance to aid the infrastructure in the State so that the coastal security is better ensured.

AP coast will have sufficient boats now as the Centre has agreed to send some. The fuel cost will also be borne by the Centre.

As of now, the State has over 20 boats, which are meant for security and surveillance.

Coastal Security Scheme

Post the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai, the Centre has come up with a comprehensive Coastal Security Scheme (CSS) to firm up security infrastructure along the coastline of the country.

Under the scheme, 183 Coastal Police Stations (CPS) have been operationalised and the security is periodically reviewed by the National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security (NCSMCS).

Marine police stations

A.P. has six such marine police stations in Dugarajapatnam, Suryalanka, Rushikonda, Vakalapudi, Kalingapatnam, and Gilakaladindi in Nellore, Guntur, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, Srikakulam, and Krishna districts.

The police will be in a better position now in handling coastal security.

