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India's Project in Mauritius Faces Protests

In 2015, India signed an agreement with Mauritius for development of Agalega Islands.

- The memorandum of understanding had provided for
 - setting up and upgradation of infrastructure for improving sea and air connectivity
 - enhancing capabilities of the Mauritian Defence Forces in safeguarding their interests in the Outer Island.
- However, since then, there have been growing reports over the Indian naval and coastguard's interests in setting up transponder systems and surveillance infrastructure, which has led to some local protests.

Agalega Project

- The project includes the construction of a jetty, rebuilding, and extension of the runway, and building an airport terminal on Agalega Island which is situated north of mainland Mauritius.
- The \$87 million projects are funded by India.

Importance of Project for India

- 95% of India's trade by volume and 68% of trade by value comes via the Indian Ocean. Nearly 80 % of India's crude oil requirement is imported by sea via the Indian Ocean. So presence in the Indian Ocean is of significance for India.
- To **counter China's 'String of Pearls'** which can prove to be a threat to our strategic interests, it became extremely necessary for us to have a presence in the larger Indian Ocean Region.
- The project can be seen as a part of India's efforts contribute in its neighbor's development stories under **SAGAR (Security And Growth for All in Region)**. The project can be seen as a way to increase cooperation between India and its neighbors.

- After facing resistance on India's project in the Maldives and on Assumption Island in Seychelles, it is extremely necessary for India to successfully implement its projects.
- The project will enhance the capabilities of Mauritius security forces through upgradation in its infrastructure.

Reasons for Protest

- **Protests from Opposition:**
 - Mauritius opposition has been raising concerns regarding transparency in the project.
 - There are issues over Indian involvement in the project and its costs and whether it would involve a military component.
 - The Mauritian government has exempted the project from any Environmental license process (EIA clearances).
- **Protests from local People:**
 - In 1965, before Mauritian independence, UK split the Chagos islands, from Mauritius, forcibly relocating the inhabitants and allowing the US to build a military base on Diego Garcia. Many Agalégans fear they could suffer a similar fate.
 - All major military powers like France, China, US, and the UK have naval bases in the Indian Ocean this is leading to fears that their peaceful island region will also be militarised.

Way Forward

Unlike the military bases run by other countries, the Indian bases are the soft base which means locals can move through any Indian-made project. So the local governments get more control over their domain, without diluting their sovereignty. Scholars suggest that India needs to project itself as a credible and long-term partner in a more persuasive manner by allaying the fears of all parties affected.

Important Facts for Prelims (29th October 2018)

Amur Falcons

- Amur falcons, the world's longest travelling raptors have started their annual migration with the onset of winters.
- The raptors breed in southeastern Siberia and northern China, and migrate in millions across India and then over the Indian Ocean to southern Africa before returning to Mongolia and Siberia. Their 22,000-kilometre migratory route is one of the longest amongst all avian species.

- They get their name from the **Amur river** that forms the border between Russia and China.
- Doyang Lake in Nagaland is better known as a stopover for the Amur falcons during their annual migration from their breeding grounds to warmer South Africa.
- The birds are not endangered, but the species is protected under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and the Convention on Migratory Species, to which India is a signatory (which means it is mandatory for the state government to protect the birds).
- Christening Nagaland as the **“Falcon Capital of the World,”** the tourism department is organising festival which will become an annual affair from 2018. It coincides with the peak migration period and best season for undertaking outdoor activities.
- It was estimated that about 10% to 12% of these migratory birds were being killed during their stopover in Nagaland.

Moths as Pollinators

- Moths are widely considered as pests, but a recent study by scientists of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has revealed that these group of insects are pollinators to a number of flowering plants in the Himalayan ecosystem. In India, estimates put the number of moth species at nearly 12,000.
- The analysis of proboscis, a long and thread-like organ used to suck flower sap, of a dozen moth species’ revealed the presence of pollen grains of several flowering plants, including Rhododendron.
- The structure of proboscis is not only meant for sap sucking, but is morphologically designed for pollination. In some species of moths, the organ is found to be modified into a spine-like structure and in others, a lateral canal to arrest and disperse pollen.
- Scientists have looked at a new group of insects (moths) as pollinators through this study. Usually bees, wasps and butterflies are considered as prominent pollinators.
- About 90% of the world’s flowering plants are pollinated by animals. Therefore, pollinators are essential for the genetic exchange among flowering plants and the biodiversity among plants.
- Almost two-thirds of common large moth species have declined over the last 40 years in some parts of the world. One of the main reasons for the decline is light pollution (an increase in artificial light in moth habitats).

Zoological Survey of India

- The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), a subordinate organization of the Ministry of Environment and Forests was established in 1916.
- It is a national centre for faunistic survey and exploration of the resources leading to the advancement of knowledge on the exceptionally rich faunal diversity of the country.

- It has its headquarters at Kolkata and 16 regional stations located in different geographic locations of the country.

Manas National Park

- India and Bhutan have agreed to work towards an integrated river basin management plan for the transboundary Manas river which flows from Bhutan to Assam.
- Manas National Park (MNP) is a UNESCO World Heritage. It is spread across 850-sq km on the Indo-Bhutan border in Assam.
- MNP has been the home of several rare and endangered species, including tigers, rhinos, swamp deer, and different species of birds.
- The MNP borders Bhutan on the north, and the forest stretches into the neighbouring country for over 1,000 square km. During the animal census, data by India and Bhutan is cross-checked and “trans-boundary” animals are indicated.
- The Manas river basin is the largest in Bhutan, flowing north to south for 272 km in Bhutan and 104 km in Assam before joining the Brahmaputra and eventually joining the Bay of Bengal.
- Originating at over 7,500m in the glacial systems of the Himalayan range to near sea-level, the river system services an extremely rich diversity of ecosystems and key wildlife including tigers and elephants, and two critical national parks in Bhutan — the Royal Manas National Park and the Manas wildlife sanctuary.
- This initiative represents a first joint attempt to address increasing trans-boundary flood risk to livelihoods, food security, life, property, and infrastructure in the rapidly changing Eastern Himalayas, particularly in Assam.
- The project aims to build trust and confidence in bi-national basin cooperation between India and Bhutan.
- It will pilot ecosystem-based approaches including watershed treatment, sediment management, community-based adaptation and flood early warning systems among other solutions identified.

Plummeting Numbers of Lesser Floricans

- Once found in abundance, the Lesser Florican (*Sypheotides indicus*), the smallest bustard, is in real danger of becoming extinct from India.
- The primary reason for this is loss of the birds’ habitat -the grasslands. These are either being overgrazed by cattle or being converted into agricultural land, typically comprising monoculture crops. This results in the reduction of biodiversity, change in natural fertility of the soil and disruption of food web involving a plethora of flora and fauna.

- Lesser Florican (locally known as “likh” or “kharmor”) is one of the four bustard species of India, all of which are threatened under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species. Four members of the Bustard family found in India are- the Indian Bustard, MacQueen’s Bustard, the Lesser Florican and the Bengal Florican.
- According to IUCN, the bird, first recorded scientifically in 1782, was found in almost in every part of India from Gujarat to Bengal and from the Saharanpur and Mainpuri districts of Uttar Pradesh to Thiruvananthapuram. It also occurred in the Terai region of Nepal, Pakistan, with vagrants (birds that have strayed from its usual range) being spotted even in Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- Now, its home is limited to conservation reserves in four districts of western Rajasthan, five districts in Gujarat, four districts each in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and one in Andhra Pradesh.
- The bird has shown adaptability while breeding in agricultural lands, which were once grasslands. These areas are particularly important and require minimal use of artificial pesticides and fertilizers, which can create feeding problems for the existing lesser florican population.
- Awareness programme with the help of state forest officials, local governments and NGOs such as Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) can immensely contribute in raising awareness among the local population in order to conserve and monitor the lesser floricans.

Electoral Bond Scheme

- The government of India has notified the Electoral Bond Scheme 2018.

○ **Provisions of the Scheme:**

- Electoral Bonds can be purchased by a person, who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India.
 - There is **no limit on investment** in Electoral bonds by a person.
 - **No interest will be paid** on the amount invested in bonds.
 - Electoral bonds have to be **encashed within fifteen days** from the date of issuance.
 - Electoral bonds are **not tradable**.
 - **Loans from banks against the security of these electoral bonds are not permitted.**
 - Only the **Political Parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951** and which secured **not less than 1% of the votes polled in the last General Election to the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly** of the State, shall be eligible to receive the Electoral Bonds.
 - **State Bank of India (SBI)** has been **authorised to issue and encash Electoral Bonds**.
 - **Know Your Customer norms of a bank's customer shall apply for buyers of the bonds.**
 - **The face value of the bonds will be counted as income by way of voluntary contributions received by an eligible political party, for the purpose of exemption from Income-tax.**
 - **Electoral Bonds will be valid for fifteen calendar days from the date of issue.**
 - The Electoral Bond deposited by an eligible Political Party in its account shall be credited on the same day.
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