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Important Facts for Prelims (22nd November 2018)

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Ortolan Bunting in India

- In a rare sighting, 'Ortolan Bunting' bird has been photographed in Mangalore. It is said to be the **first photographic record** of an **Ortolan bunting in India**.
- The Ortolan or Ortolan Buntings (*Emberiza hortulana*) are **tiny finch-like songbirds** that are part of the bunting family.
- The bird **breeds from Mongolia to Europe** and **migrates to Africa via the Middle East**.
- The Ortolan Bunting migrates mostly through Middle East and while migrating, if an Ortolan loses its way, it may land anywhere.
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) red list of threatened species has placed Ortolan bunting in the "**Least Concern**" category.
- However, it is considered a vulnerable species, especially in **France**, because the bird is trapped to be the centrepiece of a very **popular gourmet dish in French cuisine**.
- It is said to be the "**most sadistic dish**" ever as Ortolans used to be netted in great numbers, blinded using a pair of pincers, and kept in small dark boxes.
- This **inhumane trapping and slaughter was outlawed in 1999** but is still believed to be practised. In fact, until 2007 up to 50,000 of these birds were said to still have been killed due to lack of enforcement.

Devastation at Point Calimere

- After the **devastation caused by Cyclone Gaja**, Point Calimere resembles a forest in Vietnam that has been laid waste by Agent Orange.
- **Agent Orange** was a powerful herbicide (Operation Ranch Hand) used by U.S. military forces during the Vietnam War in the 1960s to eliminate forest cover and crops in Vietnam.
- In the **devastation caused by Cyclone Gaja**, thousands of birds that once made the Point Calimere sanctuary their home have died, trees have been uprooted or their branches broken or defoliated.

- The Point Calimere, the renowned wildlife and bird sanctuary on the seashore in Nagapattinam district (Tamil Nadu), is a **wetland of international importance** as it is one of the 26 designated **Ramsar** sites in India.
- The Point Calimere sanctuary consists of shallow waters, shores, long sand bars, intertidal flats and intertidal forests, **mangroves, dry evergreen forests**, saline lagoons, as well as human-made salt exploitation sites.
- **Great flamingo, Painted Stork**, Little Stint, Seagull and Brown-headed gull are normally found in the sanctuary.

Plane Flying With No Moving Parts

- Ever since the **Wright Brothers** flew the world's first plane more than a century ago, aircrafts have typically flown with the help of moving parts such as propellers, turbine blades and fans, and powered by the combustion of fossil fuels or battery packs.
- In a revolutionary change, **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** engineers have built and flown a **prototype plane with no moving parts**.
- Instead of propellers or turbines, the aircraft is **powered by electrohydrodynamic thrust** or the so-called "**ionic wind**", a phenomenon first identified in the 1960s.
- When a current passes between two electrodes, it creates a wind in the air between. If enough voltage is applied, the resulting "ionic wind" can produce a thrust without the help of motors or fuel and power a small plane.
- Earlier, BAE Systems and the University of Manchester had successfully completed the first phase of flight trials with **MAGMA**, a small-scale unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), which does away with the need for mechanical moving parts used to move flaps to control the aircraft during flight.

Innovation Cell for Higher Education Institutions

- The **Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)** has established an **innovation cell at the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)** with an aim to brainstorm new ideas about **promoting innovation in all higher education institutions** across India.
- Already, more than 1000 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have formed Institution's Innovation Councils (IICs) in their campuses to promote innovation through multitudinous modes leading to an innovation promotion eco-system in their campuses.