Diseases of Animal Origin

What is the issue?

- COVID-19 virus' spread has focused attention on the invisible processes, which help pathogens found in wild animals make the leap to humans.
- Diseases of animal origin such as Ebola, SARS, bird flu, swine flu, etc., have raised alarm over potential pandemics in recent years.

How did the virus spread?

- The Covid-19 infection, thought to have originated in a **wet market** that kept live animals in Wuhan, China, points to many underlying factors:
    1. The destruction of forests and trapping or farming of wild species has brought these animals closer to humans, and
    2. The viruses these animals harbour find ready hosts in domestic animals, moving to humans.
- **Rising economic activity**, such as road building and mining cutting through forests, has brought more people in close contact with animals.
- Another dimension is the **global trade in wild species** and their sale in markets along with domestic animals.

What does the pandemic prove?

- As COVID-19 pandemic has proved, these short-term high growth trajectories can come to an abrupt halt with a pandemic.
- Such a terrible outcome could be witnessed again, potentially caused by reckless exploitation of the environment.
- In spite of repeated warnings of crippling pandemics waiting in the wings, governments paid little attention.

What does the history say?

- The history of the lethal Nipah virus, involving transfer from bats to pigs, underscores the value of maintaining viable ecosystems, and eliminating the need for wild bats to colonise human surroundings.
- Biodiversity in forests harmlessly retains dangerous viruses and other pathogens among a vast pool of wild animals, away from people.
- This phenomenon makes clear that governments should stop viewing undisturbed landscapes as an impediment to economic growth.

What is the warning?

- Novel virus that can move effortlessly from human to human has found a large reservoir of hosts in a globalised world.
- Unlike previous epidemics, the Covid-19 has extracted a staggering toll, killing people, forcing a lockdown and causing economic devastation.
- This should serve as a warning to the government that the hasty permissions granted for new roads, dams, mines and power projects in already enfeebled forests can unleash more scourges.

What could be done?

- The government would do well, if it roll backs its dilution of the environmental clearance system.
- The government could strengthen this with a mandate to the States, and leave protected areas to scientific experts.
- Pristine forests with diverse species keep viruses virtually bottled up, out of man’s way. They should be left undisturbed.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering