Giant African Snail

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance | Species*

Why in News?

The giant African snail is spreading rapidly across Tirunavaya Panchayat in Kerala, raising health concerns among students.

- **Scientific Name** – Lissachatina fulica
- It is one of the world's largest and most damaging *land snails*, which is one of the *invasive species in India*.
- **Distribution & Habitat** – Native to *Eastern Africa*, it has quickly spread around the world and is now established in most tropical countries, especially in forest habitats.
- **Introduction to India** – It was introduced to India in 1847 and reached Madras in the early 1900s.
- It was first reported in Kerala in the 1950s at Elapully, Palakkad & the major spread waves followed in the 1970s and again in 2005.

Key Features

- **Size** – The adult shell is typically in 50-100mm long, but can grow upto 200mm.
- **Appearance** – Adult snails are very large with a long, narrow, cone-shaped shell.
- **Colour** – They can vary in colour; however, they are usually light brown, with alternating brown and cream bands on their upper whorls.

- **Diet** – They can eat plant matter (leaves, fruits, vegetables), and also occasionally dead animal remains, eggshells, stones, sand, bones and concrete (for calcium to strengthen shells).
- **Lifespan** – They can live for 3 to 5 years, and sometimes up to 10 years in captivity.
- **Conservation Status** – It is not listed in the IUCN Red List, but recognised by IUCN as one among the world's 100 worst invasive alien species.
- **Impacts** – It can affect plants by eating more than 500 crops and ornamental plants, carrying disease-causing organisms, including the rat lungworm that causes meningitis and bacteria linked to septicemia and peritonitis, causing health impacts.

References

1. The Hindu | Giant African snails in Kerala, raising health concerns for children
2. Australian Agriculture Department | Giant African Snail

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