Prelim Bits 04-09-2021 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

Red-Eared Slider Turtle

The Red-Eared Slider Turtle has recently been found accidently from the Malankara dam in Idukki.

- It is a native of the southern U.S. (Mississippi river) and northern Mexico.
- They live in still and warm waterbodies such as ponds, lakes, streams, and slow- running rivers.
- Though they can be easily trapped in small waterbodies, it is not the case in larger waterbodies such as reservoirs.
- It is identified as exotic and enlisted in the 100 most invasive species in the world.
- They are considered a major threat to native turtle specials, as they mature fast, grow larger, and produce more offspring, and are very aggressive.
- It can grow up to about 33 cm long, with a life span of close to 30 years.
- It is also known to be a carrier of human-infected bacteria such as salmonella.
- EU and Australia have imposed strict regulations on its trading and import.
- It was first observed in private aquariums in the State of Kerala.
- It is favourite among pet lovers as it is very small that can be fit into a match box, easy maintenance and relatively low cost.

Appointment of Supreme Court Judges

9 judges of the Supreme Court including one third women have taken the oath, the biggest ever number at one go. It takes the total SC strength to 33, of whom 4 are women.

- **Articles 124(2) and 217** of the Constitution govern the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court (SC) and High Courts (HC) respectively.
- Under this, the President has the power to make the appointment after "consultation" with such judges of SC and HC as the president may deem necessary.
- The word "consultation" has been at the centre of the tussle between the executive and the judiciary power over judges' appointment.
- Its meaning has been evolved over the period of time by various SC

judgments.

- Its interpretation began in 1973 following the Indira Gandhi-led government's move to supersede 3 senior judges and appoint Justice A N Ray as the Chief Justice of India (CJI).
- **First Judges Case (1981)** - In "S P Gupta v Union of India", the SC ruled that the President does not require the "concurrence" of the CJI in appointment of judges.
- It however affirmed the pre-eminence of the executive in making appointments.
- **Second Judges Case (1993)** - In Advocates-on-Record Association v Union of India, a 9-judge constitution bench evolved the 'collegium system' for appointment and transfer of judges in the higher judiciary.
- **Third Judges Case (1998)** - President K R Narayanan issued a Presidential Reference to the SC over the meaning of the term "consultation".
- The ruling on this established a quorum and majority vote in the collegium to make recommendations to the President
- Overall, all these 3 cases shrank the executive say in proposing a candidate for judgeship and also took away the executive's veto power.
- **National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC)** – In 2014, the government attempted to gain control on judicial appointments through constitutional amendments, but SC struck it down as unconstitutional.
- **HC Judges Appointment** – It is initiated by the HC collegiums and then moves to the state government, the central government and then to the SC collegiums.
- **Number of Judges** - In 1950, when it was established, it had 8 judges including the CJI.
- Parliament has the power to increase the number of judges.
- It gradually increased the number by from 8 to 34 in 2019 by amending the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act.
- **Vacancy** – The SC continues to have one vacancy whereas the HCs on average have over a 30% vacancy.
- **Retirement** - The age of retirement is 65 years for SC judges and 62 for HC judges.

In US, the Supreme Court judges serve for life.

- **Representation of Women -** In 1989, Justice Fathima Beevi became the first judge to be appointed to the Supreme Court.
- Since then, however, the SC has had only 11 women judges, inducing the three women appointed recently.
- Before the recent appointment, Justice Indira Banerjee was the only woman

judge in the Supreme Court.
- Justice B V Nagarathna is in line to become India's first woman CJI —80 years after Independence.

Mu Variant

WHO has classified yet another SARS-CoV-2 variant "B.1.621" as a variant of interest (VOI) and given it the label "Mu".

- The variant was first identified in Colombia in January, 2021.
- **Spread** - The global prevalence of the Mu variant among sequenced cases has declined and is currently below 0.1%.
- However, prevalence in Colombia (39%) and Ecuador (13%) has consistently increased.
- Larger outbreaks were reported from countries in South America and Europe.
- Cases have also been reported in the UK, US and Hong Kong.
- It was added to Public Health England's list of variants under investigation.

Classes of SARS-CoV-2 variants

- **Variant of Interest** - A variant with specific genetic markers that have been associated with changes to receptor binding which affect its diagnosis and are expected to cause unique outbreak clusters.
- It is known for it *predicted increase in transmissibility*.
- It is classified based on factors such as genetic changes that are predicted or known to affect virus characteristics such as transmissibility, disease severity, immune escape etc.
- It represents a lower level of concern than a variant of concern (VOC).
- **Variant of Concern** - A variant for which there is *evidence of an increase in transmissibility, more severe disease* (e.g., increased hospitalizations or deaths).
- It is known for its significant reduction in neutralization by antibodies generated during previous infection or vaccination, reduced effectiveness of treatments or vaccines, or diagnostic detection failures.
- Example – Alpha, Beta and Delta variants of SARS-CoV-2.
- **Variant of High Consequence** – It has clear evidence that prevention measures or medical countermeasures (MCMs) have significantly reduced effectiveness relative to previously circulating variants.

Common Prosperity

President Xi Jinping has called for China to achieve "Common Prosperity" to narrow down country's wealth gap.

- **Evolution -** It was first mentioned in the 1950s by the founding leader Mao Zedong and repeated in the 1980s by Deng Xianoping, who modernised an economy devastated by the cultural revolution.
- The wealth gap in the country threatens economic ascent and legitimacy of Communist Party rule.
- So, Chinese leaders have pledged to use taxation and other income redistribution levers to expand the proportion of middle-income citizens, boost incomes of the poor.
- It encompassed policies such as

    1. Curbing tax evasion
    2. Limits on the hours that tech sector employees can work
    3. Bans on for-profit tutoring in core school subjects and
    4. Strict limits on the time minors can spend playing video games.

- It may speed China's economic rebalancing towards consumption driven growth to reduce reliance on exports and investment.

Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express

