Prelim Bits 31-01-2023 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

Minks and Bird flu

Bird flu, a virus not known to spread easily among mammals, led to the culling of 50,000 minks in Spain in October, 2022.

- Avian influenza or bird flu refers to the disease caused by infection with avian (bird) influenza (flu) Type A viruses.
- These viruses naturally spread among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species.
- **Transmission -** Bird flu is known to jump into mammals quite often, directly from infected birds, through the consumption of bird droppings or preying on infected animals.
- To know more about classification of influenza, click here.
- But mammal-to-mammal transmission was uncharacteristic of the virus until now.
- There was a surge in mortality of minks (a *small carnivorous mammal*) in Spain due to H5N1 virus.
- The findings published indicated that mammal-to-mammal infection is made easier by at least one mutation in the virus' genome.

In 2009, swine-origin influenza A (H1N1) virus created a pandemic which is also known as 'Swine flu'.

- **Concerns -** There is a growing outbreak in avian influenzas across the word.
- The study indicates the virus H5N1 is evolving and may be gaining pandemic potential as its mutation is the same mutation of H1N1 virus.
- Minks could serve as a potential vector for interspecies transmission among birds, mammals and humans.
- The threat of the evolving H5N1 virus to humans remains unknown for now.

References

1. Down To Earth - Minks may become the bird flu vector for humans

Living Will

The Supreme Court simplified the procedure for passive euthanasia in the country by altering the existing guidelines for 'living wills'.

- **Euthanasia** - It refers to the practice of an individual deliberately ending their life, oftentimes to get relief from an incurable condition, or intolerable pain and suffering.

- Euthanasia, which can be administered only by a physician, can be either 'active' or 'passive'.
- **Active euthanasia** - It involves an active intervention to end a person's life with substances or external force, such as administering a lethal injection.
- **Passive euthanasia -** It refers to withdrawing life support or treatment that is essential to keep a terminally ill person alive.
- **Legalisation -** Passive euthanasia was legalised in India by the Supreme Court in 2018, contingent upon the person having a 'living will'.
- The apex court had held the "***right to die with dignity***" as part of the fundamental "Right to Life" under ***Article 21*** of the Constitution.
- **Living Will -** A 'Living will' is a written document that specifies what actions should be taken if the person is unable to make their own medical decisions in the future.
- In case a person does not have a living will, members of their family can make a plea before the High Court to seek permission for passive euthanasia.

Active Euthanasia	Passive Euthanasia
The use of lethal substances or forces to kill a person.	The withholding of medical treatment for continuance of life
E.g.: a lethal injection.	E.g.: withholding of antibiotics where without giving it, a patient is likely to die.

References

1. IE - What is a living will?
2. Down To Earth - Passive euthanasia

Baiga Tribal Art

Jodhaiya Bai Baiga has been awarded the Padma Shri for promoting the tribal Baiga art at the global level.

- The work of the artist, which depicts Baiga tribal culture on canvas, has been exhibited internationally in multiple countries.
- **Baigas -** The Baiga are an ethnic group found in central India primarily in the state of Madhya Pradesh, and in smaller numbers in Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.
- Baigas are considered as a particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) in the Indian Constitution.
- They rely mostly on shifting cultivation (bewar), forest produce and fishing for sustenance.
- Baiga tribe is the first community to get habitat rights in India.
- A distinguishing feature of the Baiga tribal women is sporting tattoos of various kinds on almost all parts of their body.
- This art of tattooing is called '*Godna*'.

References

1. IE - Padma Awards 2023: Jodhaiya Bai Baiga
2. IE - Baigas: India's indigenous tattoo traditions

Marriage laws in India

The Supreme Court announced that it would examine whether minor girls, as young as 15 years, can marry on the basis of custom or personal law.

- **Legal age for marriage in India -** 18 years for women and 21 years for men.Marriage below this age is considered to be child marriage, and hence an offence.
- **Offence -** In 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, who is below 18 years, is rape, reading down Section 375 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code.
- **Increasing legal age to 21 -** The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 has sought to amend the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (PCMA), 2006, to increase the minimum age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years.
- In December 2021, it was referred to a parliamentary standing committee for further deliberations, and it has already got three extensions to submit its report, the last being in October 2022.
- **Legal age in different faiths -** The minimum age of marriage for a man is 21 years and for a woman is 18 years in the following acts of different faiths,
    1. The Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872
    2. Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act, 1936
    3. Special Marriage Act, 1954
    4. Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- Under the Muslim personal law in India, persons who have attained puberty are eligible to get married i.e. on attaining the age of 15 years, while they are still minor.
- In December 2022, the National Commission for Women (NCW) filed a petition in the Supreme Court to make the minimum age of marriage for Muslim women on par with persons belonging to other faiths.
- The NCW had raised the question whether personal law could override statutory provisions of the POCSO Act and other laws.

References

1. The Hindu- Why is the SC examining marriage laws for minors?

Low-basalt Plateau

Scientists at the Agharkar Research Institute (ARI) in Pune have found a rare low-altitude basalt plateau in the Western Ghats.

- A rare low-altitude basalt plateau was discovered at Manjare village in Thane district in the Western Ghats.
- The Western Ghats are one of the 4 global biodiversity hotspots in India.
- Plateaus are dominant landscapes in the Western Ghats and significant because of the predominance of endemic species.
- They are classified as a type of rock outcrop. Three types of rock outcrops are known in Western Ghats —
    1. Lateritic outcrops at high (HLF)

    2. Lateritic low altitude (LLF)
    3. Basalt outcrops at high altitudes (BM).
- The recently discovered low altitude basalt plateau is the fourth type.

Rock outcrops are landscape habitats with more areas of rock surface exposure than surrounding areas. It emerges when the surface soil and other materials wear off, exposing the parent rock surface. The outcrop is identified if the area has more than 50 per cent of such rocks.

- **Significance -** 76 plant species belonging to 24 different families are found on the low-altitude plateau.
- Some of the plant species are unique to it while others are common among all 4 plateaus.
- These outcrops have seasonal water availability, limited soil and nutrients which provides unique and challenging environment for species to adapt to.
- It provides a unique model to study the effects of climate change on species survival and how species interact in varying environmental conditions.

References

1. IE - Rare plateau found near Thane in Western Ghats
2. Down To Earth - Pune researchers discover rare low-basalt plateau

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