Research findings on Encephalitis

Why in news?

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A research paper on epidemic Encephalitis has been realised.

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What is Encephalitis?

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- It is inflammatory brain disease which can cause severe headache and confusion.
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- The majority of cases are caused by either a viral infection or the immune system mistakenly attacking brain tissue.
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- Mild cases may cause no symptoms or mild flu-like symptoms. Severe cases can be life-threatening.
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- Immediate medical attention is required for symptoms such as confusion, hallucinations, seizures, weakness and loss of sensation.
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- It can be spread by animal or insect bites or stings.
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What is the account of this disease in India?

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- In India Japanese encephalitis (JE) is most prevalent, it caused by JE virus spread by the bite of infected mosquitoes.
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- It's more common in rural and agricultural areas which causes serious brain swelling with a sudden headache, high fever and disorientation.
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- Indian public health diagnostic machinery has built around this illness and a

vaccine was also introduced.
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- This disease is being prevalent in U.P.’s Gorakhpur district for past three decades.
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Why the disease is epidemic in few parts of India?

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- The recent research paper finds an unexpected cause of encephalitis which is recurring for several years in in Malkangiri district of Odisha.
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- Researchers finds out it was likely due to the consumption of a wild bean, called Bada Chakunda, which grows freely in the region.
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- Several natural toxins had caused fatal dysfunction of the liver, heart and brain in underfed children.
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- Even in Uttar Pradesh’s Saharanpur district, the encephalitis outbreak was traced to this bean.
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- There are also epidemics in Bihar’s Muzaffarpurdistrict which were linked to lychee consumption, again among emaciated children.
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- In all these cases, the suspicion of JE, though the epidemiology and symptoms didn’t match, which delayed the discovery of the cause.
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What are the concerns the report had pointed out?

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- As JE vaccination rates have grown, incidence has shrunk, and a host of other causes of encephalitis, like dengue, scrub typhus, and other disease have emerged to the forefront.
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- Yet investigating agencies such as the National Centre for Disease Control and the National Institute of Virology have persisted in focussing on JE.

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- There is a problem of archaic format in which encephalitis is reported to the government.
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- Under this format, if an encephalitis case cannot be confirmed as JE, doctors tag it as Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES).
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- But AES is no diagnosis, just a temporary label for different unnamed diseases.
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- Thus doctors by them don’t have a clear understanding about the disease due to narrow minded observation.
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Source: The Hindu

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