

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

### **Red-Eared Slider Turtle**

*The Red-Eared Slider Turtle has recently been found accidentally 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, including 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 its *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**

