

## UPSC Daily Current Affairs | Prelim Bits 11-05-2021

### **B.1.617 Variant - A Global Concern**

- The World Health Organization said that the B.1.617 variant - first identified in India in December 2020 - was being classified as a variant of global concern.
- Due to its increased transmissibility, the variant has spread to other countries, and many nations have restricted movements from India.
- The WHO Foundation launched "Together for India" appeal to raise funds to purchase oxygen, medicines and protective equipment for health workers.
- To know more about the double mutant B.1.617 variant, [click here](#).

### **National Horticulture Board**

- National Horticulture Board has cleared many long-pending subsidy applications for integrated development of hi-tech commercial horticulture viz. promotion of post-harvest and cold chain infrastructure.
- NHB has also facilitated the convergence of its back-ended capital investment subsidy schemes with the [Agricultural Infrastructure Fund Scheme](#) in the horticulture sector.
- National Horticulture Board (NHB) was set up by Government of India in 1984 as an autonomous organization under the administrative control of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.
- It was set up based on the recommendations of the "Group on Perishable Agricultural Commodities", headed by Dr M. S. Swaminathan, the then Member (Agriculture), Planning Commission.
- It was registered under Societies Registration Act 1860, thereafter, re-registered under the Haryana Registration and Regulation of Societies Act, 2012, with its headquarters at Gurugram.
- The management of all the activities of NHB is undertaken by a "Board of Directors" - headed by the Union Agriculture Minister as its President.
- The main objectives of the NHB are to improve integrated development of Horticulture industry and to help in coordinating, sustaining the production and processing of fruits and vegetables.

### **Great Nicobar Development Plan**

- The Environment Appraisal Committee (EAC) - Infrastructure I of the

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has flagged serious concerns about NITI Aayog's Great Nicobar Plan.

- However, the EAC has removed the first hurdle faced by the project by recommending it for grant of terms of reference (TOR) for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies.
- NITI Aayog's proposed project includes an international container trans shipment terminal, a greenfield international airport, a power plant and a township complex to be built over coastal systems and tropical forests
- The project is estimated to cost ₹75,000 crore. It will be implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Island Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) as the nodal agency.
- [ANIIDCO, the Port Blair project proponent, is a government undertaking involved in activities such as tourism, trading and infrastructure development for tourism and fisheries.]
- The EAC raised a number of additional issues, including about Galathea Bay, the site of the port and the centrepiece of the NITI Aayog proposal.

### **Galathea Bay**

- On January 5, 2021, the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) denotified the entire Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to allow for the port there.
- Galathea Bay is an iconic nesting site in India of the enigmatic Giant Leatherback, the world's largest marine turtle.
- India's National Marine Turtle Action Plan had listed Galathea Bay as one of the 'Important Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Areas' and 'Important Marine Turtle Habitats' in the country.
- It is included in Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ)-I, the zone with maximum protection.
- Another Environment Ministry expert committee approved a "zero extent" Ecologically Sensitive Zone (ESZ) for the Galathea National Park.
- Galathea Bay is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that houses many forest types, has one of the world's best preserved tropical rainforests.
- It is home to the Nicobar wild pig, Nicobar tree shrew, the Great Nicobar crested serpent eagle, the Great Nicobar crake, the Nicobar cat snake, Nicobar paradise flycatcher and the Nicobar megapode.
- The park is home to the indigenous Shompen community.

### **Kaziranga Animal Corridors**

- The authorities in Assam have begun probing cases of clearance of forest land, digging and construction activities on animal corridors within the eco-sensitive zone of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve.

- These activities violated the Supreme Court's order in 2019, "No new construction shall be permitted on private lands which form part of the nine identified animal corridors."
- Kaziranga Animal corridors are crucial for the rhinos, elephants, tigers, deer and other animals that escape a flooded Kaziranga during the monsoon months for the safety of the hills of Karbi Anglong district.

## Animal Corridors

- Animal corridors are also known as wildlife corridors or habitat corridors or green corridors. They can be underpasses or bridges.
- They allow local migratory animals to pass over or under roads and other manmade obstacles to keep them safe and their territory a bit intact.
- They are designed to keep animals from the encroaching human populations in areas of high interaction between the two.
- **Types** - There are two types of corridors, although many different kinds of ways in which these corridors can be built.
  1. **Continuous corridors** - They are large, unbroken strips of green corridor that lead to another habitat.
  2. **Stepping stone corridors** - They are small patches of habitat that are connected by smaller green corridors.

## Har Ghar Jal

- Puducherry has become 'Har Ghar Jal' UT by ensuring that every rural home in the Union Territory gets a household tap connection.
- With this, the UT becomes the fourth State/UT after Goa, Telangana and Andaman & Nicobar Islands to provide assured tap water supply to every rural home under [Jal Jeevan Mission](#).
- The UT of Puducherry is also planning to get NABL accreditation/recognition for its water quality testing laboratories and take up testing of all drinking water sources on a campaign mode.

## Connected Commerce Report

- NITI Aayog and Mastercard released a report titled 'Connected Commerce: Creating a Roadmap for a Digitally Inclusive Bharat'.
- It identifies challenges in accelerating digital financial inclusion in India.
- The report highlights key issues and opportunities, with inferences and recommendations on policy and capacity building across agriculture, small business (MSMEs), urban mobility and cyber security.
- **Key recommendations** - Strengthening the payment infrastructure to promote a level playing field for NBFCs and banks.

- Digitizing registration and compliance processes and diversifying credit sources to enable MSMEs to 'get paid, get capital and get digital'.
- Building information sharing systems, including a 'fraud repository', and ensuring that online digital commerce platforms carry warnings to alert consumers to the risk of frauds.
- Enabling agricultural NBFCs to access low-cost capital and deploy a 'phygital' (physical + digital) model for achieving better long-term digital outcomes.
- To make city transit accessible to all with minimal crowding and queues, leveraging existing smartphones and contactless cards, and aim for an inclusive, interoperable, and fully open system like London 'Tube'.

**Source: PIB, The Hindu**

