

NATIONAL SOCIAL ISSUES- WOMEN, POPULATION, URBANISATION, EMPOWERMENT ETC
ICMR launches 'MERA India' to eliminate malaria by 2030

The Indian Council of Medical Research has launched the 'Malaria Elimination Research Alliance (MERA) India' – a conglomeration of partners working on malaria control – in order to prioritise, plan and scale up research to eliminate the disease from India by 2030.

Key facts:

- The principal activity of the alliance is to prioritise, plan, conduct, scale up and translate relevant research in a coordinated and combinatorial way in order to have a tangible impact on the population who are at risk of malaria.
- The alliance will facilitate trans-institutional coordination and collaboration around a shared research agenda which responds not only to programmatic challenges and addresses gaps in available tools, but also proactively contributes to targeted research.
- It aims to harness and reinforce research in coordinated and combinatorial ways in order to achieve a tangible impact on malaria elimination.

Various efforts by government:

- Over the past two decades, India has made impressive progress in malaria control. The malaria burden has declined by over 80 per cent, 2.03 million cases in 2000 to 0.39 million in 2018, and malaria deaths by over 90 per cent, 932 deaths in 2000 to 85 in 2018.
- This success has provided a strong foundation for the commitment from the leadership of the government of India to eliminate malaria from India by 2030.
- National Vector Borne Diseases Control Program (NVBDCP) of India has developed a comprehensive framework to achieve the overarching vision of "Malaria free India by 2030".
- NVBDCP's National Strategic Plan clearly recognises the critical role of research to support and guide malaria elimination efforts.

About Malaria:

- Caused by a Plasmodium Parasites that is transmitted from one human to another by the bite of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes.
- In humans, the parasites (called sporozoites) migrate to the liver where they mature and release another form, the merozoites.
- The majority of Malaria symptoms are caused by the massive release of merozoites into the bloodstream such as anaemia is caused by the destruction of the red blood cells.
- There are five parasites that can cause Malaria in humans and the deadliest of all is Plasmodium Falciparum.
- Children under the age of 5 and pregnant women are most susceptible to the disease.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS**US places India on 'Priority Watch List'**

The United States has again placed India on its 'Priority Watch List'. India has been on the priority watch list reportedly for over 25 years, for "lack of sufficient measurable improvements to its IP framework that have negatively affected US right holders". The office of the US Trade Representative identified 11 countries, including India, in its 'Priority Watch List'. The list topped by China also includes Indonesia, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. Besides this, the US Trade body has placed 25 countries, including Pakistan, Turkey and the UAE, on the watchlist.

What is priority watch list?

- "Priority Watch List" and "Watch List" countries are identified by the annual Special 301 Report. "Priority Watchlist countries" are judged by the USTR as having "serious intellectual property rights deficiencies" that require increased USTR attention. "Watch List" countries have been identified by the USTR as having "serious intellectual property rights deficiencies" but are not yet placed on the "Priority Watchlist". The USTR can move countries from one list to the other, or remove them from the lists, throughout the year.

Why India is placed under this?

- Lack of sufficient measurable improvements to its Intellectual Property (IP) framework on long-standing and new challenges, which has negatively affected American right holders over the past year. India remains one of the world's most challenging major economies with respect to protection and enforcement of IP.
- Long-standing IP challenges facing US businesses in India include those which make it difficult for innovators to receive and maintain patents in that country, particularly for pharmaceuticals, insufficient enforcement actions, copyright policies that do not properly incentivise the creation and commercialisation of content, and an outdated and insufficient trade secrets legal framework.
- India also further restricted the transparency of information provided on state-issued pharmaceutical manufacturing licenses, and expanded the application of patentability exceptions to reject pharmaceutical patents.
- India also missed an opportunity to establish an effective system for protecting against the unfair commercial use, as well as the unauthorised disclosure, of undisclosed test or other data generated to obtain marketing approval for certain agricultural chemical products.
- Last year it engaged with India to secure meaningful IP reforms on long-standing issues, including patentability criteria, criteria for compulsory licensing and protection against unfair commercial use, as well as unauthorised disclosure, or test of other data generated to obtain marketing approval for pharmaceutical products.

Implications:

- Countries under priority watch list will be the subject of increased bilateral engagement with the USTR to address Intellectual Property (IP) concerns.
- USTR would be reviewing the developments against the benchmarks established in the Special 301 action plans for countries that have been on the 'Priority Watch List' for multiple years.
- For countries that fail to address US' concerns, the USTR will take appropriate actions, such as enforcement actions under Section 301 of the Trade Act or pursuant to World Trade Organisation or other trade agreement dispute settlement procedures, necessary to combat unfair trade practices and to ensure that trading partners follow through with their international commitments.

UN Arms Trade Treaty

US President Donald Trump has rejected the United Nations' 2013 Arms Trade Treaty aimed at regulating the global arms trade. Trump described the UN arms trade treaty as misguided and an intrusion on US sovereignty. By pulling out of the ATT, the US joins India, which has not signed the treaty.

Why is India against this treaty? One of the arguments made by India in 2013 against the treaty was that New Delhi had "strong and effective national export controls" on military hardware to ensure they don't fall into the wrong hands.

What does the Arms Trade Treaty seek to do?

- The UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) has the ambitious aim of responding to international concern that the \$70 billion a year trade in conventional weapons leaves a trail of atrocities in its wake.
- The treaty calls for the international sale of weapons to be linked to the human rights records of buyers.
- It requires countries to establish regulations for selling conventional weapons.
- It calls for potential arms deals to be evaluated in order to determine whether they might enable buyers to carry out genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes.
- The treaty also seeks to prevent conventional military weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists or organized criminal groups, and to stop deals that would violate UN arms embargos.

What types of conventional weapons deals does the Arms Trade Treaty seek to regulate?

- Conventional weapons covered by the UN Arms Trade Treaty include tanks and other armored combat vehicles, artillery, attack helicopters, naval warships, missiles and missile launchers, and small arms.
- It also establishes common international standards for the regulation of the international trade in ammunition, weapons parts, and arms components.
- The treaty does not regulate the domestic sale or use of weapons in any country. It also recognizes the legitimacy of the arms trade to enable states to provide for their own security.

INDIAN ECONOMY**Ombudsman Scheme for Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)**

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has extended the coverage of Ombudsman Scheme for Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), 2018 to eligible Non Deposit Taking Non Banking Financial Companies (NBFC-NDs).
- The coverage will be extended to Non Deposit Taking Non Banking Financial Companies having asset size of Rs 100 crore or above with customer interface.
- However, Non Banking Financial Company-Infrastructure Finance Company (NBFC-IFC), Core Investment Company (CIC), Infrastructure Debt Fund-Non-banking Financial Company (IDF-NBFC) and NBFCs under liquidation are excluded from the ambit of the Scheme.

Background:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in February 2018, issued an ombudsman scheme for non-banking finance companies (NBFCs), offering a grievance redressal mechanism for their customers.

Who will be the ombudsman? An officer at the RBI not below the rank of general manager will be appointed by the regulator as the ombudsman with territorial jurisdiction being specified by the central bank. The tenure of each ombudsman cannot exceed three years and can be reduced by the regulator if needed.

Who can file the complaint? Any customer or person can file a complaint with the ombudsman on various grounds like non-payment or inordinate delay in payment of interest, non-repayment of deposits, lack of transparency in loan agreement, non-compliance with RBI directives on fair practices code for NBFCs, levying of charges without sufficient notice to the customers and failure or delay in returning the securities documents despite repayment of dues among others. Only written complaints or those in electronic format will be accepted.

Appeal: If a complaint is not settled by agreement within a specified period as the ombudsman may allow the parties, he may, after affording the parties a “reasonable opportunity to present their case, either in writing or in a meeting, pass an award either allowing or rejecting the complaint”. The scheme also allows a person to appeal in case of dissatisfaction with any award by the ombudsman.

Compensation: The ombudsman may also award compensation not exceeding one hundred thousand rupees to the complainant, taking into account the loss of time, expenses incurred, harassment and mental anguish suffered by the complainant.

Report: The ombudsman will be required to send a report to the RBI governor annually on 30 June containing general review of the activities of his office during the preceding financial year and other information required by the central bank.

ISSUES RELATED TO INTERNAL SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT**Influence of Islamic State in India**

Islamic State (IS) has claimed responsibility for the attacks in Sri Lanka that claimed 250 lives this Easter. The threads of the attack are closely connected to India with one of the Lanka suicide bombers having stayed in India for a considerable time before the attack. A coordinated attack of this scale so close to India's shores has agencies worried.

What is the IS influence in India?

- IS came on the radar of Indian intelligence agencies way back in 2013 when reports from Syria suggested that some Indians were fighting alongside the IS there.
- It was still considered a problem of the Middle East by the agencies until in 2014, IS kidnapped 39 Indians in Iraq and executed them.
- An IS map of the Khorasan Caliphate showed some of India's states as its part.
- Since then multiple Indians have travelled to Iraq and Syria to fight alongside IS and as many as 100 have been arrested by the agencies either on return from Syria or while preparing to join them.
- Many have also been arrested for preparing to carry out an attack in India after being inspired by the IS.

India's response

- The Indian security establishment has approached the issue of IS influence with caution.
- The approach is informed by the fact that despite a very large Muslim population, India has sent very few recruits to the IS.
- It is clear that some of the youth eager to join IS are merely swayed by the IS online propaganda which has attracted a restive youth with video-game-like macabre videos.
- That they may not be fully radicalized given their unblemished background has led agencies to take the counselling approach.
- Only such people have been arrested who agencies believed were in the process of carrying out an attack or had made multiple attempts to go to Syria despite counselling.
- This included Hyderabad youth Abdullah Basith who made three attempts to go to Syria and was apprehended each time. He was finally put under arrest under charges of terrorism on his third attempt.

Why is South India more vulnerable?

- Even though it is North India which regularly sees communal clashes, it is southern states which have sent maximum recruits to IS.
- According to agencies, almost 90% of all recruits who have gone to Syria are from the southern States.
- A majority of those arrested by agencies while preparing to launch an attack are also from States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- Most recruits from Kerala who joined the Islamic State were either working in the Gulf or had come back from there with an already developed liking for IS's extreme ideology.
- States such as J&K, MP and UP in North India have also seen some IS influence on the youth.

Indians didn't fall prey to lures

- It should be stated that ISIS hasn't received support from Indian Muslims.
- For a country with the world's second largest Muslim population, India's share of pro-ISIS individuals is minuscule.

The real threats to India

- None in fact, IS has largely focused on inspiring the youth to either migrate to Syria and Iraq or carry out attacks in India with their own resources (lone wolf attacks).
- Most of the recruiters, such as banned outfits Indian Mujahideen operative ShafiArmar, too have been Indians.
- Many Indians haven't even had a handler and they have merely come together on their own to allegedly carry out attacks in the name of IS.
- Most of these groups were made to arrange for explosives and arms on their own with members contributing from their pockets.

Way Forward

- IS, although militarily now on the backfoot, is still – as the Sri Lankan attacks show – very much alive, with branches in 18 countries, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, and new forays into Bangladesh.
- In any case, thanks to Pakistan, terrorism will always remain a threat to India.
- IS needs no specific motivation to carry out such an attack. All other religions, and all those not subscribing to IS's perverted vision of puritanical Islamic supremacy, are enemies.
- A secular India is anathema for IS ideologues. That we are a democracy is also a red rag because the IS believes that 'all religions that agree with democracy have to die'.
- Thus, what happened in neighbouring Sri Lanka must act as a wake-up call for us.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The secret of getting ahead is getting started.