



Daily Current Affairs Dated On 22-Aug-2019

## GS-1

### Fossil find in kutch

#### Why in news?

The hot arid desert of Kutch was once a humid sub-tropical forest with a variety of birds, freshwater fish and possibly giraffes and rhinos, a team of Indian and French researchers has said.

Their conclusions are based on the discovery of a tranche of vertebrate fossils from nearly 14 million years ago in a geological time period known as the Miocene. After the discovery, they took nearly 12 years for analysis.

#### Details

- The fossils, consisting mostly of ribs, and parts of teeth and bones, were unearthed from Palasava village of Rapar taluk in Kutch, Gujarat.
- Overall, the fossil finds from Palasava suggest that a rich diversity of fauna and flora sustained in warm, humid/wet, tropical to sub-tropical environmental conditions during the Middle Miocene (about 14 Mya).
- The bulk of fossils unearthed in Kutch have so far been mainly marine organisms, due to their proximity to the Arabian Sea.
- Geological changes eventually closed off the salt-flats' connection to the sea and the region turned into a large lake, eventually becoming salty wetlands.
- The findings point to clues on how mammals dispersed between Africa and the Indian subcontinent when part of India was in the Gondwanaland supercontinent that existed nearly 300 million years ago.

Palaeontologist G.V.R. Prasad of Delhi University said that the finds were significant because they showed Kutch to be a potential treasure trove of mammal fossils with possible continuity to vertebrate fossils in the Siwalik, spanning Pakistan to Nepal.



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## GS-2

### Oxytocin ban

#### Why in news?

The final decision on whether the government can block private pharmaceutical companies from manufacturing and selling vital pregnancy drug oxytocin in India has been deferred, with the Supreme Court deciding the issue needs further deliberation.

While the apex court, hearing the government's appeal on the issue for several months, was expected to pronounce its judgment on the issue on August 22, a bench comprising Justices Abhay Manohar Sapre and Indu Malhotra has instead formulated seven "points" for consideration by a larger bench.

#### What is oxytocin?

- Oxytocin, also known as the 'love hormone', is a hormone secreted by the pituitary glands of mammals during sex, childbirth, lactation or social bonding.
- However, it can also be chemically manufactured and is sold by pharma companies for use during childbirth.
- It is administered either as an injection or a nasal solution.

#### Why is it vital?

- Oxytocin helps contract the uterus and induce delivery, control bleeding, and promote the release of breast milk.
- Its use is especially crucial to prevent new mothers from excessively bleeding after giving birth—a common cause of maternal deaths.
- According to an India sample registration scheme survey conducted in 2001-2003, postpartum hemorrhage accounted for 38 per cent of maternal deaths.



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### What is the case?

- The health ministry in April 2018 notified a ban on private firms from manufacturing and selling oxytocin, stating that it wanted to restrict the responsibility of supplying the drug to a Karnataka-based public sector manufacturer to avoid its misuse in the veterinary field.
- Following a case by drug makers like Mylan and Neon Laboratories and patient activist group All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN), the Delhi High Court in December quashed the ban on various grounds, including that it lacked scientific basis.
- The government has appealed the decision at the Supreme Court, arguing that the Karnataka PSU, Karnataka Antibiotics and Pharmaceuticals Ltd (KAPL), has built up the capacity to manufacture and supply the required quantity of the drug here.

### What happens now?

- The government and other parties in the case will have to place their arguments in front of the new bench on the seven points that the two judges have listed. These points are yet to be made public, as the court's latest order on this matter is not available yet.

### One nation one card

#### Why in news?

Last Friday, the government launched the pilot project for the inter-state portability of ration cards between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and between Maharashtra and Gujarat, as part of its 'One Nation, One Ration Card' scheme.



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### **What is a ration card?**

- A ration card is issued to the head of the family, depending on the number of members in a family and the financial status of the applicant.
- It is used by households to get essential food grains at subsidised prices from designated ration shops (also called fair price shops) under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS).
- Over the years, different types of ration cards were issued depending on the level of deprivation. Later, in 2013, when the National Food Security Bill was passed, different ration cards were compressed to just two -- priority and Antyodaya (for the most poor).
- The responsibility of identifying eligible families and issuing ration cards to them rests with the state/UT government.

### **What is a ration shop?**

- Ration shops can be privately owned or owned by cooperative societies or by the government. Ownership licenses are issued by the concerned state government.
- Presently, commodities including wheat, sugar, rice and kerosene are being allocated as part of the TPDS.
- State governments have the discretion to provide additional commodities.

### **What is the 'One Nation, One Ration card' scheme?**

- Since ration cards are issued by state governments, this implied that beneficiaries could procure food grains only from the designated ration shops within the concerned state.
- If a beneficiary were to shift to another state, he/she would need to apply for a new ration card in the second state.
- There were other complications. For instance, after marriage, a woman needed to get her name removed from the ration card issued to her parents, and get it added to the ration card issued to her husband's family.
- The ONORC scheme attempts to address this gap in TPDS delivery.
- Essentially, the scheme has been launched keeping in mind the internal migration of our country, since people keep moving to different states in search of better job opportunities and higher standards of living.
- As per Census 2011, 4.1 crore people were inter-state migrants and 1.4 crore people migrated (inter and intra-state) for employment.



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## **Benefits**

- With the ONORC scheme being implemented in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, the beneficiary can buy food grains from ration shops located in either of the states.
- The same is the case with Maharashtra and Gujarat.
- The government hopes to implement the scheme across India by June 1, 2020.

## **GS-3**

### **Illegal trade off tiger parts**

#### **Why in news?**

While the latest census has put India's tiger population at 2,967, the Traffic report uses the 2016 WWF estimate of 2,226, with India home to more than 56% of the global wild tiger population.

A new report has quantified the illegal global trade in tigers and tiger parts over a 19-year period between 2000 and 2018. India has the world's largest tiger population — 2,967 in the Tiger Census released last month — and the highest extent of tiger trade also happens in the country.

#### **About the report**

- The new report has been compiled by Traffic, a NGO working in conservation and currently in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature, according to the Traffic website.

#### **What it found, how?**

- Overall, a conservative estimate of 2,359 tigers were seized from 2000 to 2018 across 32 countries and territories globally.
- These occurred from a total of 1,142 seizure incidents, the report said.
- Apart from live tigers and whole carcasses, tiger parts were seized in various forms such as skin, bones or claws.
- The report explains how the number of tigers was estimated from these diverse sets of seizures.



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- On average, 60 seizures were recorded annually, accounting for almost 124 tigers seized each year.
- The top three countries with the highest number of seizure incidents were India (463 or 40.5% of total seizures) and China (126 or 11.0%), closely followed by Indonesia (119 or 10.5%).

### The India findings

- While the latest census has put India's tiger population at 2,967, the Traffic report uses the 2016 WWF estimate of 2,226, with India home to more than 56% of the global wild tiger population.
- India is the country with the highest number of seizure incidents (463, or 40% of all seizures) as well as tigers seized (625).
- In terms of various body parts seized, India had the highest share among countries for tiger skins (38%), bones (28%) and claws and teeth (42%).

### Microplastics

#### Why in news?

In its first report into the effects of microplastics on human health, WHO looked into the specific impact of microplastics in tap and bottled water.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Thursday said the level of microplastics in drinking-water is not yet dangerous for humans but called for more research into potential future risk.

#### What are microplastics?

- Microplastics are very small pieces of plastic that pollute the environment.
- Microplastics are not a specific kind of plastic, but rather any type of plastic fragment that is less than 5 mm in length according to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).
- They enter natural ecosystems from a variety of sources, including cosmetics, clothing, and industrial processes.



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### Salient points of report

- In its first report into the effects of microplastics on human health, WHO looked into the specific impact of microplastics in tap and bottled water.
  - “The headline messages to reassure drinking water consumers around the world, that based on this assessment, our assessment of the risk is that it's low.
  - WHO said that data on the presence of microplastics in drinking water is currently limited, with few reliable studies, making it difficult to analyse the results.
  - The organisation has called on researchers to conduct a more in-depth evaluation into microplastics and the potential impact on human health.
  - It has also urged a crackdown in plastic pollution to benefit the environment and reduce human exposure to microplastics.
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- The report said that irrespective of human health risks caused by microplastics in drinking-water “measures should be taken by policymakers and the public to better manage plastics and reduce the use of plastics where possible”.
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- WHO said that microplastics larger than 150 micrometres are not likely to be absorbed by the human body but said the chance of absorbing very small microplastic particles, including nano-sized plastics, could be higher, although it said data is limited.

### Future issue and way ahead

- The report warns of other dangers ahead: if plastic emissions in the environment continue at the current rate, microplastics could present widespread risks for aquatic ecosystems in a century, which could in turn increase human exposure.
  - Experts recommend wastewater treatment, which can remove more than 90% of microplastics in water by using treatments such as filtration.
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- WHO said those measures would have a double advantage as it would also address the problem of faecally contaminated water by removing microbial pathogens and chemicals that can cause deadly diarrhoeal diseases.