

**19– 09 – 2022**

**News:** ‘Crime scripts’ to unravel illegal trade of marine species

- An analysis of the illegal trade of marine species in India between 2015 and 2021 pointed out that sea cucumbers were the most frequently seized marine species group. Tamil Nadu recorded the highest enforcement action with 126 seizure incidents of the marine species.

## **Sea Cucumbers**

- Sea cucumbers are **marine invertebrates that live on the sea floor found generally in tropical regions.**
- They're named for their unusual oblong shape that resembles a fat cucumber.
- There are about **1,250 species of sea cucumber**, all of which belong to the taxonomic class Holothuroidea.
- This class falls under the Echinodermata phylum, which also includes many other well-known marine invertebrates, such as sea stars, sea urchins and sand dollars.
- They are **crucial to maintain the balance of ocean habitats.**

## Significance

- They are an **integral part of the coral ecosystem as one of the main by-products of the sea cucumbers digestion of sand is calcium carbonate** and this is **essential for the survival of the coral reefs**.
- They act like garbage collectors of the ocean world, and they recycle nutrients, thus playing an important role in keeping coral reefs in good condition.

## Threats

- **Illegal Trading and smuggling** since the species is high in **demand** across south-east Asia, mainly **China, for food** and traditional medicine.

## Protection status

- IUCN Red List: Brown Sea Cucumber (Endangered), Blackspotted Sea Cucumber (Least Concern), Blue Sea Cucumber (Data Deficient), etc.
- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I.

## Conservation Efforts

- In 2020, the Lakshadweep Islands administration created the world's first conservation area 239 km<sup>2</sup> for sea cucumbers.

**News:** Will the future of the Commonwealth change?

- The death of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, the country's longest serving ruler, who reigned for over 70 years, marks not only the end of an era for the British monarchy, but also a turning point for the 14 Commonwealth realms of which she was the Head of State.
- There has been a significant transformation of the socioeconomic milieu in these countries compared to the Elizabethan era, including calls in several nations to establish a republic and break free of historical ties to the British monarchy.
- Thus, it is possible that during the reign of the incumbent King Charles III, the Queen's successor, more nations will follow in the footsteps of Barbados, which in 2021 became the 18<sup>th</sup> country to remove the British monarch from the role of head of state and substitute them with a national government functionary.

## **Commonwealth of Nations**

- Commonwealth of Nations is a **political association of 56 member states, nearly all former territories of the British Empire.**
- The chief institutions of the organisation are the **Commonwealth Secretariat**, which focuses on intergovernmental aspects, and the **Commonwealth**

**Foundation**, which focuses on non-governmental relations between member states.

- Member states have **no legal obligations to one another**, but are connected through their use of the English language and historical ties.
- Their stated shared values of **democracy, human rights and the rule of law** are enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter and promoted by the **quadrennial Commonwealth Games**.
- The Commonwealth consists of **both republics and realms**. The **British monarch is the Head of State for the realms**, whereas the republics are ruled by elected **governments**, except in the case of five countries — Brunei Darussalam, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malaysia, and Tonga — each a self governed monarchy.
- The realms are comprised of Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, the Bahamas, Belize, Canada, Grenada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu.
- The countries of the Commonwealth cover more than 29,958,050 km<sup>2</sup>, equivalent to **20 per cent of the world's land area, and span all six inhabited continents**.

- The members have a combined population of **2.4 billion people**, almost a third of the world population, of whom **1.37 billion live in India or 94% live in Asia and Africa combined**.
- In 2019, the Commonwealth members had a **combined gross domestic product of over \$9 trillion**, 78% of which is accounted for by the four largest economies: India (\$3.010trillion), United Kingdom (\$2.743 trillion), Canada (\$1.652 trillion), and Australia (\$1.379 trillion).
- As **membership is purely voluntary**, member governments can choose at any time to leave the Commonwealth.
- Rwanda and Mozambique are **members of Commonwealth, but was never a dominion of British Empire**.
- **Former British mandates that did not become members of the Commonwealth** are Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, British Palestine, Sudan, British Somaliland, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United States of America and the United Arab Emirates.
- **Members can re - enter after opting out of it**. Recently, Maldives rejoined the group after pulling out of it in 2016.
- India being a sovereign nation, the **head of the state i.e President enjoys a paramount status in order of precedence among Indian leaders as well as leader of other nations**.

- If the King or Queen of England visits India, he or she will not be entitled to any precedence over the President of India.