09– 08 – 2024

News: Companion of the Order of Fiji

- Recently, President Droupadi Murmu has been awarded the Companion of the Order of Fiji, the highest civilian honour from Fiji recognising the strong India-Fiji ties. This recognition comes during her historic visit to the island nation, marking the first time an Indian President has travelled to Fiji.

News: Kala Azar

- Due to the growing health threat of visceral leishmaniasis (VL) (Kala-azar), the World Health Organisation (WHO) has launched a new framework to help eradicate the disease in eastern Africa.

Kala Azar

- Kala Azar (visceral leishmaniasis), also known as Black Fever is a fatal disease caused by a protozoan parasite Leishmania donovani.
- It is endemic to 80 countries, however, In 2022, eastern Africa accounted for 73% of global VL caseload, 50% of which occurred in children aged under 15 years.

Symptoms

- It is characterised by irregular bouts of fever, weight loss, enlargement of the spleen and liver, and anaemia.

Prevalence

- Most cases occur in Brazil, east Africa and India. An estimated 50,000 to 90, 000 new cases of VL occur worldwide annually, with only 25-45% reported to WHO.
- It has an outbreak and mortality potential.

Transmission

- Leishmania parasites spread through bites of infected female sandflies, feeding on blood for egg production. Over 70 animal species, including humans, can carry these parasites.

Major Risk Factors

- Poverty, poor housing, and sanitation.
- Diets lacking essential nutrients.
- Movement into high-transmission areas.
- Urbanisation, deforestation, climate change.

Diagnosis and Treatment

- Suspected visceral leishmaniasis cases require immediate medical attention. Diagnosis involves clinical signs combined with parasitological or serological tests.
- Left untreated, it can be fatal in 95% of cases.

Prevention and Control

- Early diagnosis and prompt treatment are crucial in reducing disease prevalence, and preventing disabilities, and death.
- Vector control, such as insecticide spray and the use of insecticide-treated nets, helps reduce transmission by decreasing the number of sandflies.
- Effective disease surveillance is important for monitoring and acting during epidemics and high case fatality rates.
- Social mobilization and strengthening partnerships, including community education and collaboration with stakeholders, are critical for effective control.

India's Efforts to Control Kala Azar

- In India, Leishmania donovani is the only parasite causing this disease.
- The Government of India launched a centrally sponsored Kala-azar control program in 1990-91, which was later revised in 2015.

- The program aimed to eliminate Kala-azar by 2023, aligning with the WHO neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) Roadmap goal of 2030.
- The National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP), 2003 is an umbrella programme for prevention and control of vector borne diseases viz., malaria, lymphatic filariasis, kala azar, and chikungunya.
- In 2023, Bangladesh became the first country in the world to eradicate VL.

- Recently, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has launched a new framework to help eradicate Kala Azar in eastern Africa.

The framework outlines five main strategies for guiding VL elimination:

- Early diagnosis and treatment.
- Integrated vector management.
- Effective surveillance.
- Advocacy, social mobilisation and partnership-building.
- Implementation and operational research.

News: Environmental Performance Index (EPI)

- The Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy and the Columbia Center for International Earth Science Information Network released the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) for 2024.

Global Environmental Performance Index (GEPI)

- Global Environmental Performance Index (GEPI) is a biennial index prepared by Yale University and Columbia in collaboration with World Economic Forum and Joint Research Centre of European Commission.

Objectives

- Global Environmental Performance Index (GEPI) evaluates nations' efforts to meet international environmental policy targets such as the U.N. sustainability goals, the Paris Climate Change Agreement (2015), and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Framework

- The EPI leverages 58 performance indicators grouped into 11 issue categories with 3 policy objectives: Environmental Health, Ecosystem Vitality and Climate Change.

- The EPI team transforms the raw environmental data into indicators that place countries on a 0–100 scale from worst to best performance.

India's performance

- India secured 176th rank in the EPI 2024 out of 180 countries with a score of 27.6 points, placed only above Pakistan, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar.
- India performs poorly in Air quality, Emissions, and Biodiversity Conservation, largely due to its heavy reliance on coal, which contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution levels.
- Specifically, India ranks 177th in air quality and 172nd in projected emissions by 2025.
- **The Largest Emitter of Transboundary Pollution:** In South Asia, India is identified as the largest emitter of transboundary pollution, impacting neighbouring Bangladesh and affecting residents' well-being.
- Despite its low overall ranking, India fares relatively better (133rd) in the climate change category, due to investments in renewable energy and a commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.
- However, achieving these goals will require an additional USD 160 billion annually in climate change mitigation investments.

Global Scenario

- Estonia leads the index with 75.3 points by reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 59% from 1990 levels.
- The report shows that only five countries — Estonia, Finland, Greece, Timor-Leste, and the United Kingdom — cut their GHG emissions at the rate needed to reach net zero by 2050.
- In contrast, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia rank lowest among the eight regions assessed.
- Apart from the United Kingdom, all countries identified in the 2022 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) report as being on track to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, and have either seen slow progress, as in the United States, or their emissions are still increasing, as seen in China, India, and Russia.