**Current Affairs : 17 May 2022**

**CHANGES TO BIODIVERSITY LAW WILL WEAKEN IT: JAIRAM RAMESH**

**In News:**

* Senior leader Jairam Ramesh has expressed concern over the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021.
* The bill is in the final stages of consultations in the **Joint Parliamentary Committee**.

**The Biological Diversity (Amendment) Bill, 2021**

* It was introduced in Parliament in December 2021 by Union Environment Minister and was referred to the Joint Parliamentary Committee.
* The Bill amends the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002** to simplify compliance requirements for domestic companies.
* **Access to biological resources and associated knowledge**
  + The Act requires prior approval or intimation to the regulatory authority based on the origin of the entity for obtaining biological resources occurring in India or associated knowledge.
  + The regulatory authorities under the Act for these purposes are National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) and State Biodiversity Boards (SBB).
  + The Bill amends the classification of entities, list of activities requiring intimation, and adds exemptions as listed in following figure:
* **Benefit sharing:**
  + Under the Act, NBA is required to determine **terms of benefit sharing** while granting approvals for various activities.
    - Benefit sharing refers to requiring applicants to share monetary and non-monetary benefits with benefit claimers and local people.
  + The Act makes benefit sharing provisions applicable to research, commercial utilisation, as well as bio-survey and bio-utilisation for certain entities.
  + The Bill removes its applicability from research, and bio-survey and bio-utilisation.
  + The Bill adds that SBB will determine benefit sharing while granting approvals to domestic entities as per the regulations by NBA.
* **Offences and Penalties**:
  + Under the Act, offences include failing to take approval or providing prior intimation for various activities.
    - These offences are punishable with imprisonment of up to five years, or a fine, or both.
  + The Bill decriminalises the offences and makes offences punishable with a penalty between one lakh rupees and Rs 50 lakh.
  + Continuing contravention may attract an additional penalty of up to one crore rupees.

**Concerns raised**

* **Exemption given to AYUSH practitioners**
  + Jairam Ramesh questioned the exemption given to **AYUSH practitioners** from the provisions of the law.
  + As per him, this exemption could open the law for abuse.
    - He is one of the members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee scrutinising the bill.
    - AYUSH - Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy

**MALVIYA MISSION**

**Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan pitched in with an idea of a “Malviya Mission” to develop enabling ecosystem across the country for teacher education/faculty development.**

**About:**

* Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861 – 1946) was an Indian educationist and a Freedom Fighter.
* **Names:**He was conferred the title of ‘Mahamana’ by Mahatma Gandhi. During his school days he started writing poems under the pen name ‘Makarand’ which were published in journals and magazines.
* **Role in Freedom Movement:**He was a moderate leader. He was elected as the president of Indian National Congress four times in 1909, 1918, 1932 and 1933, but owing to his arrest by the Government of India, he could not preside over the 1932 and 1933 sessions which had been banned.
* **As an Educationist:** He founded Banaras Hindu University (BHU) at Varanasi in 1916, which was created under the B.H.U. Act, 1915. He was Vice Chancellor of Banaras Hindu University from 1919–1938.
* **Journalism:**He started the 'Abhyudaya' as a Hindi weekly in 1907 and made it a daily in 1915. He also started the 'Maryada' a Hindi monthly in 1910. He started the 'Leader' an English daily in 1909. He was the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the 'Hindustan Times' from 1924 to 1946.

**NATIONAL STARTUP ADVISORY COUNCIL (NSAC)**

**The Minister of Commerce and Industry, Shri Piyush Goyal today chaired the 4th meeting of National Startup Advisory Council (NSAC) in New Delhi.**

**About:**

* Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) had constituted the National Startup Advisory Council to advise the Government on measures needed to build a strong ecosystem for nurturing innovation and startups in the country.
* Besides the ex-officio members, the council has non-official members, representing various stakeholders such as founders of successful startups.

**NavIC Grand Challenge**

* The Minister also launched NavIC Grand Challenge which aims at promoting adoption of NavIC as geo-positioning solution, a key proponent for digital Aatmanirbharta.
* The applications for the grand challenge are open on Startup India’s website ([www.startupindia.gov.in](http://www.startupindia.gov.in/)) and it aims to identify and handhold solutions of startups which are engaged in developing NavIC enabled drones.

**6G SERVICES**

**Speaking at a programme marking the 25 years of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), PM Modi said by the end of this decade, we should be able to launch 6G services, and our task force has started working on it.**



**About:**

* In telecommunications, 6G is the sixth generation standard currently under development for wireless communications technologies supporting cellular data networks.
* It is the planned successor to 5G and will likely be significantly faster.
* Like its predecessors, 6G networks will probably be broadband cellular networks, in which the service area is divided into small geographical areas called cells.
* 6G networks are likely to support applications beyond current mobile use scenarios, such as virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), ubiquitous instant communications, pervasive intelligence and the Internet of Things (IoT).

**BIRDCOUNT**

**Uttarakhand reported the highest number of bird species, at 293, while the highest number of checklists (lists of birds seen and heard by birdwatchers), at 192, was uploaded from Jammu & Kashmir, according to the primary report from birdwatchers in the Himalayan regions of India, Nepal and Bhutan.**

**About:**

* The exercise was undertaken on May 14 and a total of 607 species were documented in just one day. A checklist includes birds seen and heard.
* Bird Count India is an informal partnership of organisations and groups interested in documenting and monitoring India’s birds. The initiative encourages birdwatchers to upload their bird lists to eBird ([ebird.org/india](http://ebird.org/india)), a global platform for bird observations.
* This first edition of the event was co-organised by Bird Count India, Bird Conservation Nepal, and the Royal Society for Protection of Nature, Bhutan.

**MAME KHAN**

**A 11-member Indian delegation walked the red carpet at the inauguration of the Cannes Film Festival in France, where India has been named as the ‘country of honour’ at the Marche du Film, the business counterpart of the Cannes Film Festival.**

**About:**

* Mame Khan, a traditional Manganiyar singer from Rajasthan, became the first folk artiste to open the red carpet event for the Indian contingent. He will also perform at the festival.
* He belongs to the Manganiyar community, a Muslim community found in the desert of Rajasthan, mostly in the districts of Barmer and Jaisalmer.
* Manganiyars along with the, Langha community, are known for their folk music.
* Their songs are passed on from generation to generation as a form of oral history of the desert.
* Their key Instruments are Kamaicha, Khartaal and Dholak.

**AIR POLLUTION DEATHS**

**Air pollution was responsible for 16.7 lakh deaths in India in 2019, or 17.8% of all deaths in the country that year.**

**About:**

* This is the largest number of air-pollution-related deaths of any country, according to a recent report on pollution and health published in The Lancet Planetary Health.
* The majority of the 16.7 lakh air pollution-related deaths in India – 9.8 lakh — were caused by PM 2.5 pollution, and another 6.1 lakh by household air pollution.
* According to the report, air pollution is most severe in the Indo-Gangetic Plain. This area contains New Delhi and many of the most polluted cities.
* Burning of biomass in households was the single largest cause of air pollution deaths in India, followed by coal combustion and crop burning.
* Globally, air pollution alone contributes to 66.7 lakh deaths, according to the report, which updates a previous analysis from 2015.

**REPORT FLAGS RISK OF FORTIFIED RICE FOR SOME**

**In News:**

* According to a report, the distribution of **iron-fortified rice** through government schemes as a "magic solution" to combat anaemia in states like Jharkhand must be discontinued.
* These states have large tribal populations with sickle cell disorder, thalassemia and TB, and an excess of iron can cause health problems in these people.

**Food Fortification:**

* **About:** Food fortification or enrichment is defined as the **practice of adding vitamins and minerals** to commonly consumed foods during processing to increase their nutritional value.
* **Significance:**
  + It is a**proven, safe and cost-effective**strategy for improving diets and for the prevention and control of micronutrient deficiencies.
    - For example, in 2008 and 2012, the **Copenhagen Consensus** ranked food fortification as one of the most cost-effective development priorities.
  + Food fortification has been identified as the strategy by the World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)**to begin decreasing the incidence of nutrient deficiencies** at the global level.
* **Food fortification in India:**
  + In India, food fortification began in the **1950s** with vegetable oil fortification and salt iodization.
  + In the 2000s, the government introduced fortification of other commodities such as rice and wheat after a 60-year gap between global evidence.
  + The momentum accelerated in **2016**when the country’s food regulator **- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India** (FSSAI) established standards for fortification of rice, wheat flour, edible oil, double fortified salt (DFS) and milk.
  + FSSAI also established the **Food Fortification Resource Centre**which developed the **‘+F’** logo and helped build capacity for food producers.
* **Need:**
  + According to the WHO, undernutrition and nutrient deficiency is estimated globally to cause the **deaths of between 3 and 5 million people per year.**
  + The Global Hunger Index (GHI) report 2021 placed **India at the 101th position** (out of 116 nations). The high percentage of the**undernourished population** is one of the primary reasons for this poor performance of India.
  + **Coming to malnutrition**, as per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-4 conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare-
    - **9% of women** (15-49 years of age) are underweight (BMI less than 18.5 kg/m2).
    - This staggering data, coupled with the number of malnourished children in the country, presents a grim situation.
* **Major problems with food fortification:**
  + **Inconclusive evidence:**According to some scientists, evidence supporting fortification in India is certainly not adequate before major national policies are rolled out.
  + **Adverse health impacts:** According to a study published in the Lancet, both anaemia and Vitamin A deficiencies are over diagnosed in India, meaning that mandatory fortification could lead to **hypervitaminosis**.
  + **Conflict of interest:** The studies which FSSAI relies on to promote fortification are sponsored by food companies who would benefit from the government’s food fortification programme.
  + **Nutrients don’t work in isolation:** Adding one or two synthetic chemical vitamins and minerals will not solve the larger problem.