



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 01-03-2024

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Rajya Sabha polls

Syllabus: GS-2: Indian Polity – Rajya Sabha.

Context:

- *Recently, Rajya Sabha Polls took place in various states.*
- *Rajya Sabha elections: BJP-led NDA just 4 short of majority mark of 121.*

About Rajya Sabha

Composition of Rajya Sabha

- *The maximum strength of the **Rajya Sabha is fixed at 250**, out of which, 238 are to be the representatives of the states and union territories (elected indirectly) and 12 are nominated by the president.*
- *At present, the **Rajya Sabha has 245 members**. Of these, **229 members represent the states**, 4 members represent the union territories and 12 members are nominated by the president.*
- ***The Fourth Schedule of the Constitution** deals with the allocation of seats in the Rajya Sabha to the states and union territories.*

1. Representation of States

- *The representatives of states in the Rajya Sabha are **elected by the elected members of state legislative assemblies**.*
- *The election is held in accordance with the **system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote**.*
- *The **seats are allotted to the states in the Rajya Sabha on the basis of population**. Hence, the number of representatives varies from state to state.*
- ***For example**, Uttar Pradesh has 31 members while Tripura has 1 member only.*
- *However, in USA, **all states are given equal representation** in the Senate irrespective of their population.*
- *USA has 50 states and the Senate has 100 members–2 from each state.*

2. Representation of Union Territories

- *The representatives of each union territory in the Rajya Sabha are **indirectly elected by members of an electoral college specially constituted for the purpose**.*
- *This election is also held in accordance with the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote.*
- *Out of the nine union territories, **only three (Delhi, Puducherry and Jammu & Kashmir) have representation in Rajya Sabha**.*
- *The populations of other six union territories are too small to have any representative in the Rajya Sabha.*

3. Nominated Members

- **The president nominates 12 members** to the Rajya Sabha from people who have special knowledge or practical experience in art, literature, science and social service.
- The rationale behind this principle of nomination is to provide eminent persons a place in the Rajya Sabha without going through the process of election.
- It should be noted here that the **American Senate has no nominated members.**

Duration of Rajya Sabha

- The Rajya Sabha (first constituted in 1952) is a continuing chamber, that is, **it is a permanent body and not subject to dissolution.**
- However, **one-third of its members retire every second year.** Their seats are filled up by fresh elections and presidential nominations at the beginning of every third year.
- The retiring members are **eligible for re-election and renomination** any number of times.
- The Constitution has **not fixed the term of office of members** of the Rajya Sabha and left it to the Parliament.
- Accordingly, the **Parliament in the Representation of the People Act (1951)** provided that the term of office of a member of the Rajya Sabha shall be six years.
- The act also empowered the president of India to curtail the term of members chosen in the first Rajya Sabha. In the first batch, it was decided by lottery as to who should retire.
- Further, the act also authorised the President to make provisions to govern the order of retirement of the members of the Rajya Sabha.

Voting Process in Rajya Sabha Elections:

- **Estimating Party Seats:**
 - Parties estimate the number of seats they would win based on their strength in the Assembly.
 - Contest may be avoided if parties field candidates in line with their expected seats.
- **Candidate Nomination Requirements:**
 - Party candidates need **proposals from at least 10 Assembly members** or 10% of the party's strength, whichever is lower.
- **Independent candidates** require 10 proposers, all Assembly members.
- **Single Transferable Vote System:**
 - Electors can vote for multiple candidates in order of preference.
 - A candidate needs a specified number of first preference votes to win.
- **Determining the Quota:**

- *The winning candidate needs one point more than the quotient obtained by dividing the total value of seats plus one.*
- *For example, with four seats and 180 MLAs, the qualifying number is $180/5 = 36$ votes or a value of 3,600.*

Reasons for Open Ballot System in Rajya Sabha Polls:

- 1. Curbing Cross-Voting*
- 2. Limited Transparency*
- 3. Verification Process*
- 4. Invalidation of Votes*
- 5. Preventing Coercion*
- 6. Balancing Transparency and Confidentiality*

Exclusion of NOTA in Rajya Sabha Polls:

- **Decision by Election Commission:**
 - *Initially, the Election Commission of India (ECI) allowed Rajya Sabha members to exercise the option of None of the Above (NOTA) in Upper House polls through circulars issued on January 24, 2014, and November 12, 2015.*
- **Legal Principle:**
 - *The decision underscores a legal principle that **NOTA is intended for direct elections where voters directly choose their representatives, rather than indirect elections where representatives are chosen by other elected representatives.***

Voting in Rajya Sabha Election Without Taking Oath:

Supreme Court Ruling:

- *The Supreme Court has ruled that a legislator can vote in a Rajya Sabha election even before taking the oath as a member of the Assembly.*

Non-Legislative Activity:

- *Voting in Rajya Sabha polls is considered a non-legislative activity according to the court's interpretation.*

Membership Upon Notification:

- *According to the ruling, a person becomes a member of the Assembly as soon as the list of elected members is notified by the Election Commission of India (ECI).*

Proposing Candidates Before Oath:

- *Additionally, the court stated that a member can also propose a candidate for the Rajya Sabha election before taking the oath of office.*

DHARMA GUARDIAN EXERCISE

Syllabus: GS-2: International Relations – Bilateral Military exercises.

Context:

- *The 5th iteration of the Joint Military Exercise 'Dharma Guardian' involving the **Indian Army and the Japan Ground Self Defence Force** commenced on February 25th and is set to wrap up on March 9th, 2024, held at Mahajan Field Firing Ranges in Rajasthan.*

About Joint Military Exercise "EX DHARMA GUARDIAN"

- *Between India and Japan*
- *Dates: February 25th to March 9, 2023*

Significance

- *Annual training event crucial for security challenges faced by both nations*
- *Covers platoon level joint training on jungle and semi-urban/urban terrain operations*

Participating Troops

- *Garhwal Rifles Regiment of the Indian Army*
- *Infantry Regiment from the Middle Army of the Japan Ground Self Defence Force (JGSDF)*

Objectives

- *Share experiences to enhance inter-operability in planning & execution*
- *Share best practices in tactics, techniques, and procedures*
- *Focus on high physical fitness and sharing of tactical drills*

Activities

- *Joint planning and tactical drills*
- *Basics of establishing integrated surveillance grids*
- *Employment of aerial assets*

Outcomes

- *Enhanced understanding and cooperation between the two armies*
- *Strengthened bilateral relations between India and Japan*

Overall Impact

- *Enhances defense cooperation*
- *Builds camaraderie and friendship between Indian and Japanese forces*

Collective Security Treaty Organization

Syllabus: GS-2: International Organisations.

Context:

- **Armenia To Withdraw from Russia-Led CSTO; Boosts Ties With India & France Amid Azerbaijan Tensions?**

Key Reasons for Armenia's Dissatisfaction with CSTO:

- **Lack of Support During Conflicts with Azerbaijan:** *Armenia has repeatedly criticized the CSTO for what it perceives as a failure to provide adequate assistance during clashes with Azerbaijan, particularly the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.*
- **Russia's Growing Ties with Azerbaijan:** *Armenia is concerned about the deepening military and economic cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan.*
- *This alliance is viewed as a potential threat to Armenia's security.*
- **Western Outreach:** *Armenia has been exploring closer ties with Western powers, including France and the United States.*
- *This move has been seen as an attempt to diversify its security relationships beyond dependence on Russia and the CSTO.*

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO):

Formation and Background:

- *Established in 2002, based on the Collective Security Treaty (1992), also known as the Tashkent Pact.*
- **Originally comprised six post-Soviet states:** *Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan left in 2012 and currently holds observer status.*
- *Headquarters are in **Moscow, Russia.***

Objectives:

- **Collective defense:** *Respond to external aggression against any member state.*
- **Maintaining peace and stability:** *Promote regional security through conflict resolution and peacekeeping operations.*

- **Combating common threats:** *Counter terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and cyber threats.*
- **Military cooperation:** *Joint military exercises, training, and development of collective military capabilities.*



Structure:

- **Collective Security Council (CSC):** *Highest decision-making body, comprising Heads of State of member countries.*
- **Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (CMFA):** *Oversees foreign policy coordination.*
- **Council of Ministers of Defense (CMOD):** *Manages military cooperation and joint operations.*
- **Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils (CSSSC):** *Coordinates national security agencies.*
- **Collective Security Forces (CSF):** *Rapid deployment force for collective defense and peacekeeping.*

Significance:

- **Provides a security framework** for member states, particularly relevant in the context of regional instability.
- **Plays a role in regional conflict resolution** and counter-terrorism efforts.
- **Creates a platform for military cooperation** and defense modernization among member states.

Challenges and Criticisms:

- **Dominance by Russia:** *Concerns exist regarding Russia's dominant influence within the organization, potentially hindering the independence of other members.*
- **Effectiveness in conflict resolution:** *The perceived lack of decisive action during the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan raised questions about the CSTO's effectiveness.*

- **Compatibility with Western alliances:** *The CSTO's alignment with Russia can create challenges for member states seeking closer ties with Western powers.*

India's fight against rare diseases

Syllabus: GS-3: General Science – Rare diseases.

Context:

- *19-year-old child actress Suhani Bhatnagar passed away from **dermatomyositis**, a rare disorder causing muscle inflammation.*
- *Her demise coincided with **Rare Disease Day**, observed annually in February.*

Significance of Rare Disease Day:

- *Dedicated to **supporting individuals with rare medical conditions**, often neglected and stigmatized.*
- *Aims to **raise awareness about the challenges** faced by those with rare diseases.*

Statistics and Challenges:

- *According to the **World Health Organization**, rare diseases affect 1 or fewer per 1,000 population.*
- *Only about 5% of the over 7,000 known diseases worldwide are treatable.*
- *Many patients receive **only basic treatment** to alleviate symptoms.*
- *Some require **expensive antidotes** and supportive medication they can't afford.*
- ***Suffering and death** are common outcomes for many affected by rare diseases.*

Rare Diseases in India:

Incidence and Variety:

- *India represents **one-third of global rare disease cases**, with over 450 identified diseases.*
- ***Examples include** Spinal Muscular Atrophy, Gaucher's disease, Mucopolysaccharidosis type 1, and Whipple's disease.*
- **Prevalence and Demographics:**
- ***Roughly 8 crore-10 crore Indians** are affected by rare diseases, with over 75% being children.*
- *Despite significant prevalence, rare diseases are often overlooked in India.*

Government Policies and Challenges:

- ***Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** formulated a national policy in 2017 but withdrew it in 2018 due to implementation challenges.*

- *Revised policy **National Policy for Rare Diseases (NPRD)** announced in 2021, but issues persist, including lack of clear definitions and confusion over disease coverage and patient eligibility.*

Diagnosis and Treatment:

- *Timely and accurate diagnosis is crucial, but **it takes an average of seven years** for rare diseases to be diagnosed.*
- ***Lack of awareness** among physicians contributes to delayed diagnosis.*
- *Less than 50% of identified **rare diseases in India** are treatable, with limited availability of approved treatments.*

Funding and Resource Allocation:

- ***Budget allocation for rare diseases remains low**, with inconsistencies in fund utilization among Centers of Excellence (CoEs).*
- *NPRD guidelines **allow up to ₹50 lakh per patient**, which is inadequate for lifelong management and therapy.*
- ***CoEs face challenges** in initiating treatment due to funding constraints, leading to potential legal issues.*

Crowdfunding and Sustainability:

- *NPRD's suggestion for **CoEs to crowdfund for rare disease treatments** raises questions about sustainability.*
- ***Crowdfunding efforts have yielded limited results**, indicating challenges in relying solely on this approach for funding rare disease treatments.*

Proposed Solutions for Rare Diseases in India:

Standard Definition and Increased Budget:

- *Central government should establish a standard definition of rare diseases.*
- *Increase budgetary allocations to address the challenges associated with rare diseases.*

Dedicated Funding for Drug Development and Therapy:

- *Allocate specific funds for **research and development** of drugs for rare diseases.*
- *Increase funding for **therapy and treatment options**.*

Expansion of Centers of Excellence (CoEs) and Coordination:

- *Increase the **number of CoEs across India** to improve accessibility.*
- *Ensure better **coordination and responsible utilization** of funds among CoEs.*

State Government Initiatives:

- **Introduce social assistance programs** at the state level to support individuals with rare diseases.
- **Develop satellite centers under CoEs to extend healthcare services** to remote areas.

Public-Private Partnerships:

- **Engage public and private companies** for funding rare disease initiatives.
- **Leverage Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and partnerships** to bridge funding gaps.

Addressing Drug Pricing and Availability:

- Address the issue of exorbitant drug prices by **waiving GST on life-saving drugs**.
- **Incentivize domestic drug manufacturers** under schemes like the Production-Linked Incentive Scheme.
- Explore options such as **repurposed drugs and bulk-import** to enhance availability.

Conclusion:

- Despite challenges, addressing rare diseases in India requires concerted efforts from **both government and private sectors**.
- With **proper funding, coordination, and innovative solutions**, it's possible to improve the lives of those affected by rare diseases and find sustainable solutions to their healthcare needs.

Newly discovered Sea Slug

Syllabus: GS-3; Environment and Ecology

Context

- **The Zoological Survey of India** named a new marine species of **head-shield sea slug with ruby red spot** which was discovered from **West Bengal and Odisha coast** after **President of India Droupadi Murmu**.

More to know

- This species belonging to **Melanochlamys genus** was discovered from **Digha of West Bengal coast and Udaipur of Odisha coast**.
- The new species of head-shield sea slug, which is found nowhere in the world, is named as **Melanochlamys droupadi**.



Features

- Species of the genus *Melanochlamys* are characterised morphologically by a **short, blunt and cylindrical body** and a **smooth dorsal surface** with two dorsal equal or unequal shields, named the **anterior cephalic and posterior shield**
- The species was confirmed by examination of morphological, anatomical and molecular characteristics.
- It is a small invertebrate with a maximum length up to 7 mm, brownish black in colour with a ruby red spot in the hind end, shell inside the body, hermaphrodite, normally crawling on the intertidal zone, which left the crawl mark behind them in the sandy beaches.

Distribution

- Species of this group are generally distributed in **temperate regions** of the **Indo-Pacific Oceanic realm** but three species are truly tropical distributed, ***Melanochlamys papillata*** from the Gulf of Thailand, ***Melanochlamys bengalensis*** from West Bengal and Odisha coast and the present species.

About- Sea slug

- Sea slug is a common name for some **marine invertebrates** with varying levels of resemblance to terrestrial slugs.
- Most creatures known as sea slugs are gastropods, i.e. they are sea snails (marine gastropod mollusks) that, over evolutionary time, have either entirely lost their shells or have seemingly lost their shells due to having a significantly reduced or internal shell.

