Important Facts for Prelims (4th September 2018)

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INDIAN ROOFED TURTLE

- In order to save the Indian Roofed Turtles (*Pangshura tecta*) in the Lota Devi temple pond in West Bengal Jalpaiguri district, NGOs Society for Protecting Ophiofauna and Animal Rights (SPOAR) and Wildlife Trust of India have decided to install an idol of Vishnu in his Kurma (turtle) avatar at the temple complex. The religious sentiments of devotees will be used to help reduce pollution in the pond.
- *Kurma* avatar is s**econd Avatar of Lord Vishnu** in the form of a turtle to support the foundation for the cosmos.

Indian Roofed Turtle (*Pangshura Tecta*)

- **Habitat**: Small rivers, stagnant water bodies and sometimes in large rivers.
- **Geographic Range**: Indian Roofed Turtle are found in Pakistan, India (Ganges, Brahmaputra and Indus River drainages), Bangladesh and Nepal.
- **Protection Status**:
  - CITES: Appendix 1
  - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule 1
  - IUCN Red List : Low Risk, Least Concern.
- **CITES** stand for Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna.

  Under Appendix 1, CITES prohibits International trade in specimens of these species except when the purpose of the import is not commercial e.g. scientific research.
- **WPA, 1972 (schedule 1)-** provides absolute protection and offences under these are prescribed the highest penalties.

GM Mustard Trial

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC), the apex body deciding on genetically modified organisms in the country, has put off a decision on allowing tests to study GM mustard's impact on the honeybee population.

GM Mustard

- Dhara Mustard Hybrid (DMH -11) is the transgenic mustard in question, has been developed by a team of scientists at Delhi University led by former vice-chancellor Deepak Pental under a government-funded project.
- In essence, DMH -11 uses three genes from soil bacterium that makes self-pollinating plants such as mustard amenable to hybridisation.
- This provides the local crop developers with an opportunity to develop more easily the versions of mustard with custom traits such as higher oil content and pest resistance.
- Adverse impact on biodiversity, health, ecology etc are the concerns related to DMH-11.
- Recently Environmental activists have objected to the approval of DMH-11, as the transgenic variety may be detrimental to the survival of honeybees.

Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)

- GEAC functions in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).
- It is responsible for appraisal of activities involving large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants in research and industrial production from the environmental angle.
- The committee is also responsible for appraisal of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered (GE) organisms and products into the environment including experimental field trials.
- GEAC is chaired by the Special Secretary/Additional Secretary of MoEF&CC and co-chaired by a representative from the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).