Background

On October 24, 2019, about 200 officials, including policemen, gathered at Sherkot in Uttar Pradesh’s Bijnor district.

It was a planned raid, not to apprehend criminals, but to check on organised factories that were making paint brushes with mongoose hair.

By the end of the day, ten manufacturing units in Sherkot were raided and approximately 26,000 brushes and over 100 kg of raw mongoose hair was seized. About 26 people were arrested in connection with illegal trade in mongoose hair.

Raids were carried out not only in Uttar Pradesh, but also at Jaipur in Rajasthan, Mumbai and Pune in Maharashtra, and in Kerala, on the same day.

Operation Clean Art

- Operation Clean Art was the first pan India operation to crack down on the smuggling of mongoose hair in the country.
- Operation Clean Art was conceived by Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) with the singular aim of ensuring that the mongoose hair brush trade be closed down across the country.
- There are six species of mongoose found in India and mostly recovered in the raids are grey mongoose hair.

‘Organised crime’

- An adult mongoose yields over 3040 gm of long hair, from which only 2025 gm of “brush-making hair” is recovered.
- There are six species of mongoose found in India and mostly recovered in the raids are grey mongoose hair.
- Most of these animals were poached by “hunting communities” across the country.
- About 49 arrests were made and 27 cases were registered under the Wildlife Protection
Act (1972).

- For about 150 kg of mongoose hair, at least 6,000 animals would have been killed.

**Spreading Awareness**

- There have been instances in which mongoose hair has been transported using courier companies.

- Postal authorities are also trying to involve the Postal Department to spread awareness and identify illegal trade in wildlife.

- There is also a campaign on social media where concerned organisations are urging artists to take a pledge to refrain from using brushes made of mongoose hair.

‘Alternatives needed’

- Wellknown sculptor and painter Bimal Kundu said the reason painters prefer brushes made of mongoose hair is because they are superior and hold colour better.

- But, the alternatives available in the market are not of good quality. More research should be done to make paint brushes that fit the requirements of an artist.

**Way forward**

- Art is supposed to be something unique and evoke the best among people. Why should there be cruelty and criminality involved in the process of creation of art?

- Art should be clean and artists should take a pledge that they will not use brushes made of mongoose hair. The mongoose is listed in **Schedule II Part 2 of the Wildlife Protection Act** and any smuggling or possession of its body part is a nonbailable offence. Persons using brushes made of mongoose hair should be aware of it.

**About Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)**

Wildlife Crime Control Bureau is a statutory multi-disciplinary body established by the Government of India under the MoEFCC, to combat organized wildlife crime in the country.

Under Section 38 (Z) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, it is mandated:
• To collect and collate intelligence related to organized wildlife crime activities.
• To disseminate the same to State and other enforcement agencies for immediate action so as to apprehend the criminals.
• To establish a centralized wildlife crime data bank.
• Co-ordinate actions by various agencies in connection with the enforcement of the provisions of the Act.
• Assist foreign authorities and international organization concerned to facilitate co-ordination and universal action for wildlife crime control.
• It also assists and advises the Customs authorities in inspection of the consignments of flora & fauna as per the provisions of Wild Life Protection Act, CITES and EXIM Policy governing such an item.

In 2018, United Nation Environment (UNEP) awarded Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India with Asia Environment Enforcement Awards, 2018 for excellent work done by the Bureau in combating transboundary environmental crime.