

### **3. Coral Reefs**

#### **Why in News?**

- The dead coral reefs were recently observed near Kurusadai (Tamil Nadu), one of the 21 uninhabited islands forming the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park.

#### **Highlights**

- The primary reason behind this loss is *Kappaphycus alvarezii*, a seaweed species deliberately introduced for commercial cultivation some two decades ago
- Seaweed is the name given to the many species of marine algae and plants that grow in water bodies such as rivers, seas and oceans.
- They vary in size, from microscopic to large underwater forests.
- Seaweed is found on the shores across the world, but is more commonly a staple in Asian countries.
- Seaweed has numerous benefits, including being a source of nutrition, containing anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial agents for medicinal purposes
- Contributing to economic growth through its use in manufacturing, acting as a bioindicator by absorbing excess nutrients and balancing out ecosystems.
- Trapping excess iron and heavy metals and supplying oxygen and nutrients to other marine life forms.
- India cultivated around 34,000 tonnes of seaweed, and the Centre earmarked Rs 600 crore to increase seaweed production to 11.85 million tonnes by 2025.
- Currently, about 750 farmers are engaged in seaweed farming, primarily *Kappaphycus*, in 18 villages of Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu and it is also likely to be cultivated in Tamil Nadu's proposed seaweed park.
- National research institutes and companies are for increased cultivation of *Kappaphycus* to improve livelihoods, profits and to reduce India's import of kappa-carrageenan.