

Date: 08/04/2023

Honourable President of India Smt. Droupadi Murmu inaugurated Gaj Utsav 2023 on April 7 at Kaziranga National Park in Assam.

Project Elephant:

- Launched in the year 1992.



- Centrally sponsored scheme; finance and technical support by MOEFCC to major elephant range states in India.
- It aims to safeguard the estimated 30,000 to 40,000 wild elephants. This make up over 60% of the world's population.
- The Elephant range states in India are: Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal.

Objectives of Project Elephant:

- Protecting elephant
- Conserving their natural habitat
- Keeping their corridor clear from obstructions
- To address issues of man-animal conflict

Asian elephant:

- 3 Sub-species of elephant are as follows - Indian, Sumatran and Sri Lankan
- Asian elephant herd were led by oldest and largest female elephant; Gestational period 22 months
- IUCN: Endangered
- CITES: CITES-I APPENDIX

African Savannah Elephant:

Two sub-species Savannah elephant and Forest elephant.

IUCN Status:

- **African Savanna Elephant:** Endangered.
- **African Forest Elephant:** Critically Endangered.
- **CITES: Appendix II**

Facts about elephants in India:

- Elephants serve cultural icons in India.
- They are flagship species for larger biodiversity conservation with major presence across diverse ecosystems in India.
- India is one of the 13 elephant range countries in Asia.
- India harbours over 60% of wild Asian elephant population in the world.
- In India, elephants are placed in Schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 Government of India launched "Project Elephant" during 1992 to vitalise elephant conservation in India
- Elephants were declared as 'National Heritage Animal' during the year 2010.

How many elephant reserves in our country?

- 33 Elephant reserves from 14 states. A total area of Elephant is 8077.6 sq.km.
- **Agasthyarmalai Elephant Reserve** in Tamilnadu is declared as 32nd elephant reserve.
- **33rd Elephant Reserve is the Terai ER** set up in Uttar Pradesh.
- Elephants occur in a variety of habitats ranging from tropical evergreen forests (>300 mm of annual rainfall) to semi-arid areas (<500 mm annual rainfall).

Ways to conserve

- Invasive species like lantana and eupatorium which prevent the growth of grass for elephant
- Gaj Yatra which is a nationwide awareness campaign.
- Monitoring the illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme tracks information regarding illegal killing of elephant across Africa and Asia launched in 2003.

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Important Judgement

Supreme court upheld the 2011 order of the Madras High Court (HC) on the Nilgiris elephant corridor, right to passage of the animals and the closure of resorts in the area.

- **Article 51 A(g):** It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures.

Challenges of Elephant corridor

- There are more than 100 elephant corridors in India 22% of elephant corridor with width 1 to 3km.
- Right of Passage report released by Wildlife Trust of India
- Two-third elephant corridor in India with highways passing through them so increases the possibility of human-animal conflict.

Miscellaneous:

- Kaziranga and Manas NP are invaluable heritage of the world and were given world heritage site by UNESCO.
- Elephant Census 2017 states that Karnataka has highest number of elephants; Assam has 2nd largest elephant population in India.

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