



Current Affairs of the Day

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- SC asks for a timeline on appointments

GS Paper - III

- ‘High debt burden could hamper India’s ability to provide stimulus’
- Conservationist joins panel on elephant corridor case

Prelims:

- Russia gives nod to extend START treaty



SC asks for the timeline on appointments

Issues: Judicial vacancy, delays in appointment

The Supreme Court questioned the government about the delay in clearing Collegium recommendations for judicial appointments to various High Courts.

Highlights:

1. The Bench noted how recommendations from the High Courts of Bombay and Allahabad dated back to May or June last year. It said 189 proposals for judicial appointments were still pending.
2. Last year, the Supreme Court had conveyed its alarm at the rising number of judicial vacancies in various High Courts. Some of them were functioning only with half their sanctioned strength.

'High debt burden could hamper India's ability to provide stimulus'

Job loss, income shocks pose 'highly negative' risks: Moody's

Highlights:

1. India's high government debt could limit its ability to give a fiscal stimulus to the economy.
2. Job losses, income shocks and the gaps in health infrastructure pose 'highly negative risks' for the country's growth prospects, Moody's added.
3. It warned that the sheer magnitude of the recession would lead to a degree of economic scarring in the more vulnerable Asian economies, which was likely to have persistent effects on potential output.
4. Moody's expects income and social inequality to widen in 2021, while the number of people falling into poverty will rise significantly, erasing three to four years' gains on poverty reduction.

Way Forward: Social Spending

The rating agency said the traditional emphasis on infrastructure spending to support growth may now have to expand to include social spending on healthcare and pensions.



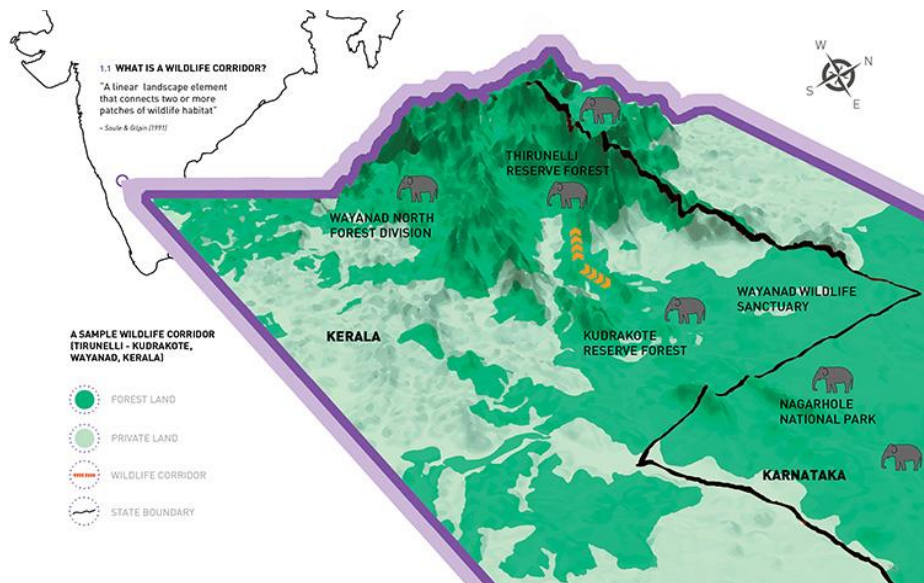
Conservationist joins panel on elephant corridor case

Issues: Wildlife Corridors, Right to the passage of Animals

The Supreme Court-appointed a conservationist as Member of a Committee constituted by it last year to hear complaints by landowners against the action taken by the Nilgris Collector, which included the sealing of their buildings and allegations about the “arbitrary variance in the acreage of the elephant corridor.”

Highlights:

1. Earlier, the top court upheld the Tamil Nadu government's authority to notify an 'elephant corridor' and protect the migratory path of the animals through the Nilgiri biosphere reserve.



2. The reserve is the largest protected forest area in India, spanning across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. The court said it was the State's duty to protect a “keystone species” such as elephants, immensely important to the environment.
3. The corridor is situated in the ecologically fragile *Sigur plateau, which connects the Western and the Eastern Ghats* and sustains elephant populations and their genetic diversity. It is situated near the Mudumalai National Park in the Nilgiris district.
4. It has the Nilgiri Hills on its southwestern side and the Moyar River Valley on its north-eastern side. The elephants cross the plateau in search of food and water.



The Big Squeeze

1. India has by far the largest number of wild Asian elephants in the world, estimated at 27,312 according to the 2017 census, about 55% of the species' global population.
2. They range in 29 Elephant Reserves spread over 10 elephant landscapes in 14 states, covering about 65,814 sq km of forests in northeast, central, north-west and south India.
3. The animals require free movement between these areas to maintain genetic flow and offset seasonal variations in the availability of forage and water.
4. But if that seems like a vast amount of territory, consider that Elephant Reserves (unlike a Tiger Reserve) include areas of human use and habitation – in fact, unless they lie within existing Reserve Forests or the Protected Area network, Elephant Reserves are not legally protected habitats in themselves.
5. That's why 'elephant corridors' are so important. As forest lands continue to be lost, these relatively narrow, linear patches of vegetation form vital natural habitat linkages between larger forest patches.
6. They allow elephants to move between secure habitats freely, without being disturbed by humans. In many cases, elephant corridors are also critical for other wildlife including India's endangered National Animal, the Royal Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris*).

Russia gives nod to extend START treaty

Russian lawmakers on Wednesday quickly approved the extension of the last remaining nuclear Russia-U.S. arms control treaty, an action that comes just days before it's due to expire. Both houses of Parliament voted unanimously to extend the New START treaty for five years.

About New Start:

The treaty, signed in 2010 by President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, limits each country to no more than 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads and 700 deployed missiles and bombers and envisages sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance.



The treaty doesn't put a constraint on testing, development, or deployment of current or planned US missile defence programs or long-range conventional strike capabilities.

After both Moscow and Washington withdrew from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019, New START is the only remaining nuclear arms control deal between the two countries.