Kerala Elephant Killing

Why in news?

A pregnant elephant in Kerala died due to the treacherous use of a food bomb by the locals.

What happened?

- Many elephants are killed every year in India as their paths cross those of humans.
- But the image of a mortally wounded animal standing impassively in a river in Palakkad as life ebbed out of it will remain in our mind.
- Whether the booby-trapped pineapple that took the life of elephant was intended for elephants or other animals matters little.
- Because such traps litter the troubled landscapes that surround forests across the country.
- The perpetrators may be prosecuted for the elephant's death.
- But this can do little to mitigate the larger issue of lost ranges and blocked corridors for these wandering giants.

What does this incident remind us?

- The tragic fate that occurred to this creature is a reminder of the **rising human-animal conflicts**.
- These conflicts are only destined to grow, as commercial pressures eat into already diminished habitat.
- India has just under 30,000 elephants but no strong science-imbued policy that encourages soft landscapes and migrating passages that will reduce conflict.
- It is the **lack of a scientific culture** and the **readiness** to spare forested lands from commercial exploitation.

What are the reasons for conflict?

- **Shrinking ranges** and **feeding grounds for elephants** cause serious worry, because the animals look for soft landscapes adjoining forests such as coffee, tea and cardamom estates.
- In the **absence of these soft landscapes**, they wander into food-rich farms falling in their movement pathways.

- Research in Karnataka showed that 60% of elephant distribution was encountered outside protected areas.
- In Kerala, such movement along human-dominated landscapes routinely produces conflict.
- **Politicians** in the State were opposed to the Madhav Gadgil Committee Report calling for the Western Ghats to be classified as ecologically sensitive and spared of destructive development.
- With such **fundamental philosophical disagreement**, and a vision of lush landscapes as just a resource to be exploited, animals have little chance of escaping deadly conflict.

What is needed?

- A sensible course open to conservation-minded governments is to end all intrusion into the 5% of protected habitat in India.
- The governments must draw up better compensation schemes for farmers who lose crops to animals.
- A culture shift to protect would genuinely enrich people and save biodiversity.

Source: The Hindu

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