Man-Animal Conflict - Elephants Train Collisions

What is the issue?

Elephants are often victims of train collisions and electric fences in the rising man-animal conflicts.

How frequent are the deaths?

- **RTI data -** RTI reply by Project Elephant division of the MoEFCC shows killing of 1,160 elephants due causes other than natural causes over 11 years (till 2020).
- 741 deaths were due to electrocution; railway accidents accounted for 186 cases; poaching 169 and poisoning 64.
- **CAG Report -** Of the 29,964 elephants in India, nearly 14,580 are in the southern region.
- That a greater number of casualties getting reported are in elephant passages has been confirmed by the C&AG in its latest compliance audit report on the Ministry of Railways.

How to save elephants from Electrocution?

- **Hanging Solar Powered Fences** - Electric fences or barbed wire fences can be replaced with hanging solar-powered fences, as has been planned in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
- It will be installed on pillars and stainless steel wires will be hung from the main line. The fence is connected to a solar power supply point.
- Here small animals could freely and safely move under them.
- At the same time electric shock in such fences will be of mild intensity and will cause no harm to big animals.
- Such hanging fences could be employed across the forest fringes to prevent the entry of elephants from the woods to human habitations.
- They will be effective even in marshy and high conflict zones too.
- **Planting citronella and lemon grass -** This is done in Golaghat district of Assam. Elephant avoid coming to such areas due to its aroma.
- Planting such crops instead of electric fences is a viable alternative.
- At the same time authorities should ensure that there are no illegal electric fences or barbed wire fences.

- **Participation of local communities -** The critical role elephants play in biodiversity conservation must be highlighted, especially to those living in areas close to elephant corridors.
- **Wildlife crossings or eco-bridges -** The Environment Ministry and Ministry of Railways should also expedite proposals for elevated wildlife crossings or eco-bridges and underpasses for the safe passage of animals.
- A finding of the C&AG was that after the construction of underpasses and overpasses in the areas under the jurisdiction of East Central and Northeast Frontier Railways, there was no death reported.

What CAG report suggests for Elephant Train collision?

- Periodic review of identification of elephant passages.
- More sensitisation programmes for railway staff.
- Standardisation of track signage.
- Installation of an animal detection system (transmitter collars)
- 'Honey bee' sound-emitting devices near all identified elephant passages.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/corridors-of-death/article37833915.ece
2. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/hanging-power-fences-proposed-to-keep-wild-elephants-at-bay/article36567198.ece

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