

SC Order on Nilgiris Elephant Corridor

Why in news?

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Supreme Court recently directed the TN government to seal resorts and hotels in the Nilgiris elephant corridor.

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What is the Court's order?

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- The Tamil Nadu government has to seal or close down within 48 hours, 11 resorts and hotels.

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- These were constructed on the elephant corridor of Nilgiris in violation of law.

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- Owners of other resorts and hotels in the area were asked to place their documents of approval before the Collector within 24 hours.

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- The Collector will verify the documents and check if a resort or hotel has been constructed with proper prior approval.

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- If not, then the same should also be closed down within 48 hours.

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What is the status of elephant corridors?

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- As estimated, there are 101 elephant corridors, of which almost 70% are used regularly.

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- Nearly three-quarters of the corridors are evenly divided among southern, central and northeastern forests.

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- The rest are found in northwest Bengal and the northwestern region.
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- Some of these passages are precariously narrow, at only a hundred metres wide.
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- **Nilgiris** - There are an estimated 6,500 elephants in just the Brahmagiri-
Nilgiris-Eastern Ghats ranges.
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- Most of the resorts in the Nilgiris have come up right under the gaze of the
Forest Department.
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- The majority continue to function without the requisite permissions.
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- This must be thoroughly investigated to check whether there was any
wrongdoing.
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- The grey area of mushrooming home-stay structures, which are just hotels on
forest fringes, also deserves scrutiny.
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What is the need?

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- Forests that have turned into farms and unchecked tourism are blocking
animals' paths.
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- Animals are thus forced to seek alternative routes resulting in increased
elephant-human conflict.
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- Weak regulation of ecotourism is severely impacting important habitats.
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- It particularly affects animals that have large home ranges, like elephants.
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- The movement of elephants is essential to ensure that their populations are
genetically viable.
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- It also helps to regenerate forests on which other species, including tigers,
depend.
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- Elephant corridors are also crucial to reduce animal fatalities due to accidents and other reasons.
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- So fragmentation of forests makes it all the more important to preserve migratory corridors.
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- Ending human interference in the pathways of elephants is more a conservation imperative.
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- The Supreme Court's order is thus a necessary step to restore the ecology of these spaces.
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What is the way forward?

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- Nearly 40% of elephant reserves are vulnerable, as they are not within protected parks and sanctuaries.
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- Also, the migration corridors have no specific legal protection.
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- Illegal structures in these pathways should be removed without delay.
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- Efforts should be to expand elephant corridors, using the successful models within the country.
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- This includes acquisition of lands using private funds and their transfer to the government.
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Source: The Hindu

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