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### **1. Why does Kerala want the Centre to amend the Wildlife Protection Act?**



Kerala wants the Centre to classify wild boar as vermin.

#### **Why in news?**

Recently, Kerala Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a resolution urging the Union Government to amend relevant sections of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 to address the escalating human-animal conflict in the state.

#### **Demand to amend section on hunting**

Section 11 of the 1972 Act regulates hunting of wild animals. As per clause (1)(A) of the section, the Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW) of a state may — if satisfied that a wild animal specified in Schedule I (mammals) has become dangerous to human life or disabled or diseased beyond recovery — permit hunting or killing of such animal. The section gives powers to the CWLW to order killing of such a wild animal, if it cannot be tranquillised or relocated after capturing. Now, Kerala wants to amend the Section 11 (1) (A) so as to devolve the above-mentioned powers of the CWLW to Chief Conservators of Forests (CCF) instead. Such an amendment, the state feels, would simplify procedures for dealing with wild animals posing a threat to human life, by enabling speedy and timely decisions to be taken at a more localised level. Kerala has five CCFs, each in charge of a different region of the state.

#### **Demand to declare wild boar as vermin**

Kerala also wants the Centre to declare wild boar as vermin, as per section 62 of the Wildlife Protection Act. According to this section, the Union Government can notify any wild animal in Schedule II of the Act (which protects it from hunting), as vermin for a period of time in an area/state.

An animal is declared as vermin when it poses threat to life and crops. Once declared as vermin, wild boar would lose its protection from hunting, thus enabling the state and citizens to cull the wild boar population to protect against the menace the species poses to life and livelihood.

### **An escalating crisis**

Kerala has seen a steady rise in human-animal conflict in recent years. Attacks from wild animals not only pose a threat to life, but have also wreaked havoc in the state's agriculture sector. The issue has now come to a head after a radio-collared wild elephant strayed into a village, chased people, and trampled a person to death in Wayanad.

Wild boars, in particular, are notorious for devastating farmland. After the Centre previously rejected demands for declaring the species as vermin, Kerala, in 2022, empowered local self-governing bodies to deploy licenced shooters to kill wild boars that raid crops and foray into human settlements.

However, this step did not help address the wild boar menace for want of licenced shooters in villages, as well as the long-winding process of involving the forest department after every killing. This is why the state is once again pushing wild boar to be declared as vermin, which would allow villagers to deal with the menace themselves.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Indian Express

## **2. China's 'Xiaokang' border defence villages along the LAC, now being occupied**



India has also focused on strengthening its border infrastructure and improving forward connectivity

### **Why in News?**

The Chinese people have started occupying several of the country's model 'Xiaokang' border defence villages, along its border with India's northeastern region.

Since 2019, China has been building villages along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which separates India and China, but they were unoccupied until a few months ago.

Some villages along the LAC, and opposite the Lohit Valley and the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh, are now being occupied by residents

#### **What are these Xiaokang border defence villages?**

China has been constructing 628 such Xiaokang or “well-off villages” along India’s borders with the Tibet Autonomous Region for over five years now. These have been constructed all along the LAC, including the Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh borders.

The structures include mostly double-storey, large and spacious buildings. The construction for most of these planned villages has already been completed, as per officials.

The exact purposes of these villages have remained unclear, but they were understood to be dual-use infrastructure — can be used both for civil and military purposes — and have thus been a concern from a defence perspective. The strategic community looks at it as a way to assert Chinese claims over certain areas along the LAC.

Notably, the exact extent of the LAC has been a source of contention between the two countries for years. India considers it to be 3,488 km long, while China says it is around 2,000 km.

#### **How is India responding to it?**

The Indian government announced the Vibrant Villages Programme in 2022 to develop its border villages into modern villages with all amenities and as tourist attractions. The programme builds on the existing Border Area Development Programme (BADP) under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

Under the programme, India plans to develop 663 border villages into modern villages in the first phase.

#### **What other infrastructure is being developed by China along India’s northeast?**

China has been constantly building infrastructure all along the LAC, including in Arunachal Pradesh’s Tawang region and the Siang Valley.

This includes the construction of new roads and bridges to improve connectivity through the passes. China has also been constructing houses and other infrastructure in Bhutanese territory.

India has also focused on strengthening its border infrastructure and improving forward connectivity with the construction of new roads, bridges, and helipads. There has also been a push to develop alternate routes to the LAC and improve inter-valley connectivity in the northeast.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Internal Security

Source: The Indian Express

### **3. Why did Kosovo face delays in Schengen approval?**

### Why in news?

Kosovo recently secured visa-free access to the Schengen zone in Europe, world's largest zone of free movement, becoming the last western Balkan non-European Union nation to be waived visa requirements. The zone is known after Schengen, the tiny Luxembourg village bordering France and Germany, where the agreement was signed in 1985 among five of the six EU founding members except Italy. Citizens of Kosovo can now enter the Schengen as tourists for 90 days within 180 days. Croatia, a European Union (EU) member since 2013, joined Schengen in 2023, while Romania and Bulgaria, EU members since 2007, will gain partial Schengen entry in March.



### Why was Kosovo's application kept pending for years?

The single biggest obstacle to the country's Schengen visa waiver was strong opposition from several EU members, which do not recognise the 2008 unilateral declaration of independence by the breakaway state from Serbia.

Kosovo has not been accorded legal statehood by the UN and denied recognition by Russia and

China.

### Is admission to Schengen mandatory for EU members?

Yes and no. When the Schengen agreement took effect in 1995, only seven of the entire 15 member union at the time joined the passport-free area. Today, 23 of the 27 EU states are part of the passport-free zone. But then, the Schengen area comprises 27 countries, including four non-EU members: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Norway.

### What are the advantages of the EU's border-free policy?

For nationals of any country, the benefit is the freedom to travel with a single Schengen visa to other European nations within the borderless area. For EU states, the Visa-free borderless travel, alongside the single currency adopted by 20 EU countries, is the most visible symbol of European integration.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: The Hindu