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1. What are the new rules for elephant transfers?

Why in News?

The Centre has notified a set of rules called the Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024 that liberalises the conditions under which elephants may be transferred within or between States.



What are the rules around the transfer and transport of elephants?

Elephants are, according to the provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, a Schedule 1 species and therefore, be it wild or captive, cannot be captured or traded under any circumstances. Section 12 of the Act allows Schedule I animals to be translocated for 'special purposes' such as education and scientific research. They can also be translocated for population management of wildlife without harming any wild animal and collection of specimens for recognised zoos/museums.

Captive elephants because of their historical role in forest management, timber transport, presence in estates of erstwhile royal families and in temple precincts for religious purpose can be owned and therefore come under a special category. However, strict rules guide the transfer of such elephants.

Section 40 (2) of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 prohibits the acquisition, possession and transfer of a captive elephant without the written permission of the Chief Wildlife Warden of the State.

Until 2021, however, these laws explicitly said that such transactions ought not to be of a 'commercial nature'. The Environment Ministry in 2021 brought in an amendment that allowed the transfer of elephants for 'religious or any other purposes'.

Such a broad interpretation, activists and researchers said, could accelerate trafficking and illegal commercial transactions. A standing committee, led by former Environment Minister, Jairam Ramesh, opposed this section but it was passed into law.

What do the updated rules say?

These rules provide new relaxations under which captive elephants can change owners or be transferred. These include, for instance, situations when an owner is no longer in a position to maintain the elephant or when a state's Chief Wildlife Warden "deems it fit and proper" to transfer the elephant in circumstances which call for better upkeep of the elephant. Before a transfer within the State, an elephant's health has to be ratified by a veterinarian, and the Deputy Conservator of Forests has to establish that the animal's current habitat and prospective habitats are suitable. The Chief Wildlife Warden on receipt of such documents may choose to reject or approve the transfer.

If the transfer involves moving the elephant outside of a State, similar conditions apply. Before a transfer is effected, the "genetic profile" of the elephant has to be registered with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Earlier rules required that an elephant being transferred from say, Assam to Gujarat would need permissions from the Chief Wildlife Wardens of every State that the elephant would pass through in the process of being ferried by road. Now only the originating and recipient States' permissions are required.

What do the updates mean?

The Wildlife Protection Act is essentially a prohibitive law. It puts in a variety of restrictions to curb the trafficking of wild animals. However independent researchers say that with regard to elephants the law has become lax. The establishment of India's largest private zoo in Jamnagar, Gujarat which is affiliated to the Reliance Foundation, has brought some of these questions to the fore. The facility, which is a rescue centre and ostensibly exists to rehabilitate traumatised and injured elephants, among other wildlife, hosts a reported 200 elephants and controversially also hosts "healthy animals," according to a recent journalistic investigation published in the periodical Himal Southasia. There are also concerns that some of these elephants aren't captive but sourced from the wild.

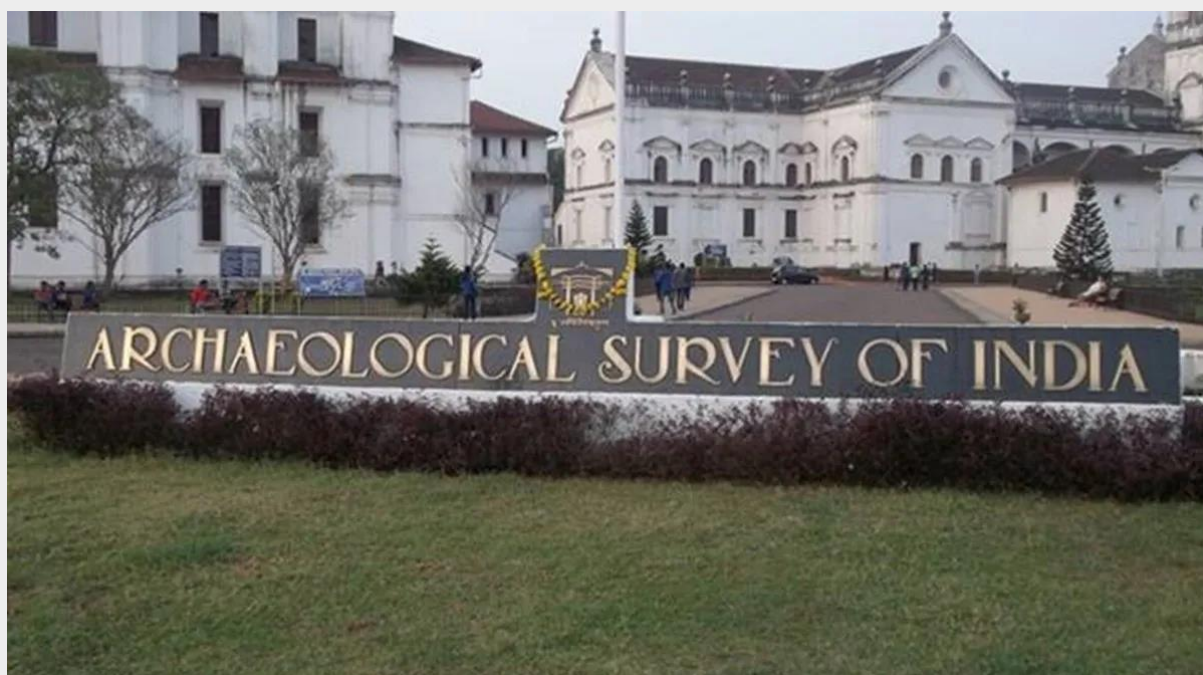
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: The Hindu

2. Archaeological Survey of India will 'delist' some 'lost' monuments. What's happening, and why?

Why in news?

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has decided to delist 18 “centrally protected monuments” because it has assessed that they do not have national importance. These 18 monuments are part of an earlier list of monuments that the ASI had said were “untraceable”. Among the monuments that face delisting now are a medieval highway milestone recorded as Kos Minar No.13 at Mujessar village in Haryana, Barakhamba Cemetery in Delhi, Gunner Burkill’s tomb in Jhansi district, a cemetery at Gaughat in Lucknow, and the Telia Nala Buddhist ruins in Varanasi. The precise location of these monuments, or their current physical state, is not known.



So what exactly does the “delisting” of monuments mean?

The ASI, which works under the Union Ministry of Culture, is responsible for protecting and maintaining certain specific monuments and archaeological sites that have been declared to be of national importance under the relevant provisions of The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 and The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (AMASR Act).

Delisting of a monument effectively means it will no longer be conserved, protected, and maintained by the ASI. Under the AMASR Act, any kind of construction-related activity is not allowed around a protected site. Once the monument is delisted, activities related to construction and urbanisation in the area can be carried out in a regular manner.

The list of protected monuments can grow longer or shorter with new listings and delistings. ASI currently has 3,693 monuments under its purview, which will fall to 3,675 once the current delisting exercise is completed in the next few weeks. This is the first such large-scale delisting exercise in several decades.

Section 35 of the AMASR Act says that "If the Central Government is of opinion that any ancient and historical monument or archaeological site and remains declared to be of national importance...has ceased to be of national importance, it may, by notification in the Official Gazette, declare that the ancient and historical monument or archaeological site and remains, as the case may be, has ceased to be of national importance for the purposes of [the AMASR] Act.

The gazette notification for the 18 monuments in question was issued on March 8. There is a two-month window for the public to send in "objections or suggestions".

And what does it mean when the ASI says a monument is "untraceable"?

The AMASR Act protects monuments and sites that are more than 100 years old, including temples, cemeteries, inscriptions, tombs, forts, palaces, step-wells, rock-cut caves, and even objects like cannons and mile pillars ("kos minars") that may be of historical significance.

These sites are scattered across the length and breadth of the country and, over the decades, some, especially the smaller or lesser known ones, have been lost to activities such as urbanisation, encroachments, the construction of dams and reservoirs, or sheer neglect, which has resulted in their falling apart. In some cases, there is no surviving public memory of these monuments, making it difficult to ascertain their physical location.

Under the AMASR Act, the ASI should regularly inspect protected monuments to assess their condition, and to conserve and preserve them. In cases of encroachment, the ASI can file a police complaint, issue a show-cause notice for the removal of the encroachment, and communicate to the local administration the need for demolition of encroachments.

This, however, has not happened with uniform effectiveness. The ASI, which was founded in 1861 after the need for a permanent body to oversee archaeological excavations and conservation was realised, remained largely dysfunctional in the decades that followed.

The bulk of the currently protected monuments were taken under the ASI's wings from the 1920s to the 1950s, but in the decades after Independence, the government chose to spend its meagre resources more on health, education, and infrastructure, rather than focusing on protecting heritage, officials said. The ASI also concentrated more on uncovering new monuments and sites, instead of conserving and protecting existing ones.

How many historical monuments have been lost in this way?

In December 2022, the Ministry of Culture submitted to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture, that 50 of India's 3,693 centrally protected monuments were missing. Fourteen of these monuments had been lost to rapid urbanisation, 12 were submerged by reservoirs/ dams, and the remaining 24 were untraceable, the Ministry told the Committee.

The Committee was informed that security guards were posted at only 248 of the 3,693 protected monuments. In its report on 'Issues relating to Untraceable Monuments and Protection of Monuments in India', the Committee "noted with dismay that out of the total

requirement of 7,000 personnel for the protection of monuments, the government could provide only 2,578 security personnel at 248 locations due to budgetary constraints”.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express

3. ICCC: Integrated farm data dashboard for customised solutions

Why in news?

Earlier this month, Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda inaugurated a Krishi Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC) set up at Krishi Bhavan in New Delhi, a big-screen dashboard of all digital innovations in the sector. Officials described the ICCC as a “significant leap forward” in leveraging technology for the advancement of agricultural practices.

What is the Krishi ICCC?

The ICCC is a tech-based solution involving multiple IT applications and platforms, which is designed to help in making informed decisions. The centre is housed in the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers’ Welfare, which is responsible for legislation, policy formation, and implementation of initiatives in the agriculture sector.

The ICCC uses state of the art technologies such as artificial intelligence, remote sensing, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to collect and process large amounts of granular data — on temperatures, rainfall, wind speed, crop yields and production estimations — and presents it in graphical format.

What do you get as the visual output?

On eight large, 55-inch LED screens installed at the ICCC, you can see information on crop yields, production, drought situation, cropping patterns (geographic region-wise and year-wise) in map, timeline, and drill-down views.

You can also see the relevant trends (periodic and non-periodic), outliers, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and receive insights, alerts, and feedback on agriculture schemes, programmes, projects, and initiatives.

The ICCC uses platforms including the Krishi Decision Support System (DSS) to collect micro-level data, process it, and present the macro picture.

The ICCC has a contact centre and a helpdesk facility, with the operator’s handset capable of being converted into a call centre. If needed, farmer beneficiaries can interact directly with officials or the Minister through video conferencing facilities.

What is the objective of the ICCC?

The ICCC will enable comprehensive monitoring of the farm sector by making available at one place geospatial information received from multiple sources, including remote sensing; plot-level data received through soil survey; weather data from the India Meteorological Department (IMD); sowing data from Digital Crop Survey; farmer- and farm-related data from Krishi MApper, an application for geo-fencing and geo-tagging of land; market intelligence

information from the Unified Portal for Agricultural Statistics (UPAg); and yield estimation data from the General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES).

The integrated visualisation of the data will enable quick and efficient decision-making by the The ICCC ecosystem can be linked with the PM-Kisan chatbot going forward.

Can the command and control centre generate individual farmer-specific advisories?

Going forward, the ICCC can create an ecosystem based on which individual farmer-level advisories can be generated through apps like Kisan e-mitra, a chatbot developed for PM-Kisan beneficiaries.

The AI-/ machine learning-based system will identify a farmer through his/ her mobile number or Aadhaar, and match it with the farmer's field information obtain through land records, historical crop sowing information from the crop registry, weather data from IMD, etc. It will then generate a customised advisory in the local language of the farmer. For this, the system will use the Bhashini platform that allows translation into several Indian languages.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

FARMER'S ADVISORY: The ICCC allows visualisation of GIS based soil carbon mapping as well as soil health card data for a particular district together at one place. "This, when visualised with weather-related data from IMD for the selected district, will allow a customised and authentic advisory to be sent to the farmer about the type of crops that can be grown, and water and fertiliser requirements," an official said.

DROUGHT ACTIONS: According to officials, increase or decrease in yield from a specific region (as per GCES data) can be correlated with weather, rainfall, and other information visualised through the Drought Portal, enabling the administration to understand the reason for increase/ decrease in yield and to take decisions proactively.

CROP DIVERSIFICATION: An analysis of crop diversification maps, together with field variability for paddy, will enable decision-makers to identify regions with scope for diversified cropping, so that farmers can be advised accordingly.

FARM DATA REPOSITORY: Krishi Decision Support System (K-DSS), a platform under development, will act as an agriculture data repository. Integrated spatial and non-spatial data will be superimposed as a layer on the GIS map, and various AI/ ML models would be run on the data. The K-DSS will help in evidence-based, efficient, and data-driven decision-making, and assist in preparing customised advisories for farmers.

VALIDATION OF YIELD: Yield as captured through Krishi Mapper can be analysed with the yield generated through GCES application for a plot.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express