

# UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES 20-09-2023

## ELEPHANT CORRIDORS

**A new elephant corridor report released by the central government showed a 40 per cent increase in elephant corridors across 15 elephant range states in India.**

Elephant corridors can be described as a strip of land that enables elephant movement between two or more friendly habitats. The number of elephant corridors have increased to 150 against 88 registered by the Government of India in 2010. The elephant population in the country is estimated to be over 30,000.



West Bengal has the most elephant corridors — 26 — amounting to 17 per cent of the total corridors, the report said. East central region contributed to 35 per cent, that is 52 corridors, while Northeast region was second largest with 32 per cent number meaning 48 corridors in total.

Southern India registered 32, that is 21 per cent of the elephant corridors, while northern India was lowest with 18 corridors or 12 per cent.

Majority of the corridors were noted to be within state boundaries and the intensity of the use of corridors has increased by 40 per cent. However, it showed that 19 per cent of the corridors, that is 29, showed a decrease in use while 10 others were seen impaired and demanding restoration for facilitating elephant movement.

The decrease in corridor use is attributed to the habitat fragmentation, shrinkage and destruction.

The increase in the elephant corridors also reflected that elephants have expanded their ranges in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra neighboring Chhattisgarh and southern Maharashtra bordering Karnataka. Elephants have also seen an increased presence in Madhya Pradesh found in Sanjay Tiger reserves and Bandhavgarh. Besides that, ranges have also increased in northern Andhra Pradesh where the elephants access movement from Odisha.

In these states, long-term viability of habitats to support elephant populations, followed by a data-driven approach in identifying corridors would be pertinent. Similarly, data on elephant

movement remains sketchy in many northeastern states that harbour a relatively small population of elephants.

## VIBHAV

**Six hundred indigenously manufactured self-neutralizing anti-tank mines, known as "Vibhav", have been inducted into the Army.**

Aim: to provide mobility kill against all enemy armored vehicles. Anti-Tank Mines Vibhav and its Features



"Vibhav" is a point-attack anti-tank munition.

- The anti-tank mine is made of new-age plastic, which gives it adequate strength and durability to withstand the requirements of storage, handling, and operating in varying field conditions.
- It has been designed and developed completely indigenously in a joint venture with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in India.
- The mines are designed to provide mobility kill against all enemy armoured vehicles. The munition can be laid both mechanically or manually.

A host of safety and actuation mechanisms have been incorporated in "Vibhav" to make it safe to handle, lethal against targets and reliable. The integrated explosive, mechanical, and electronic safety features ensure utmost operator safety. On the other hand, the lethality of the munition ensures effectiveness against all current and futuristic armored vehicles.

The munition also incorporates an electronic anti-handling and anti-lift device (EAHALD) that stays active for 120 days once armed. It has mechanical timers now. Due to this, after 120 days, it will be self-neutralised. It has a storage life of 10 years with no special storage requirements.

## ANAMUDI SHOLA NATIONAL PARK



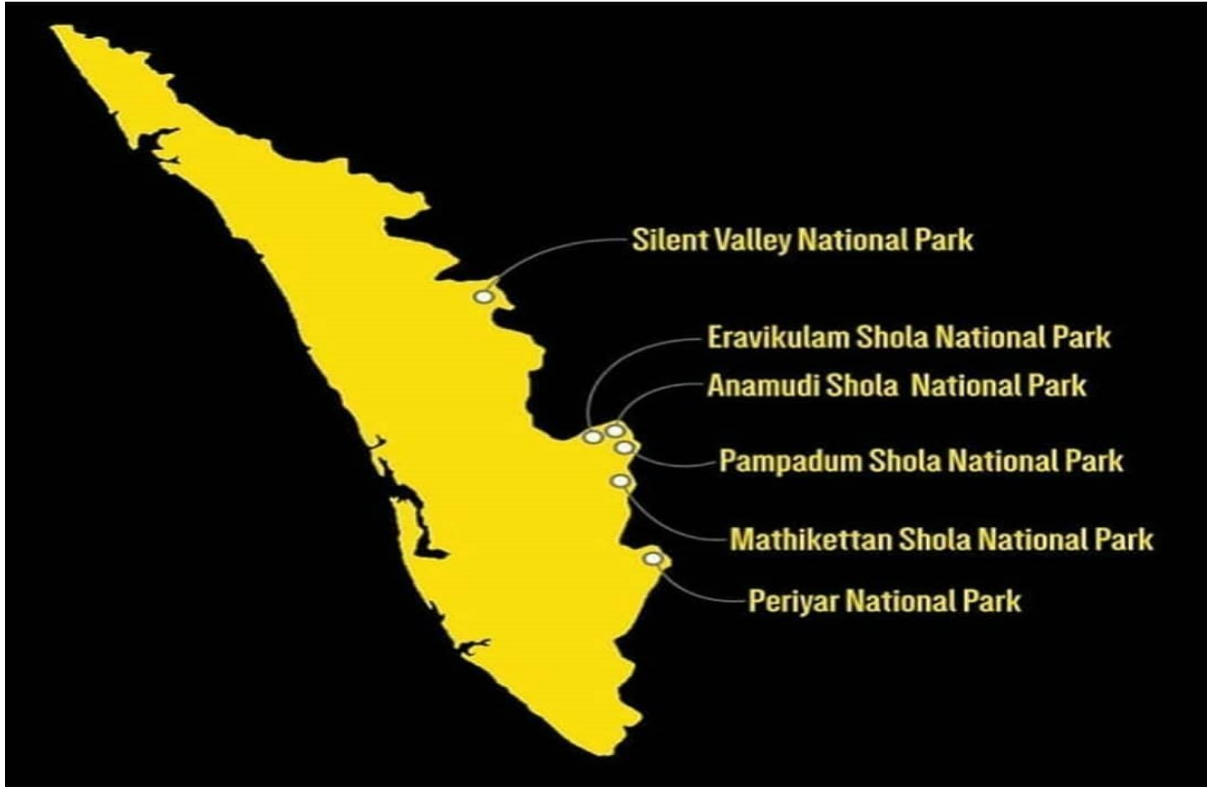
**Area in Anamudi Shola National Park has transformed into a green heaven teeming with life due to conservation efforts.**

### **Anamudi Shola National Park**

- Anamudi Shola National Park is a protected area located along the Western Ghats of Idukki district in Kerala state.
- It lies just east of Eravikulam National park.
- It is surrounded by Eravikulam National Park, Pampadum Shola National park, Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary and Mathikettan Shola Park.
- Anamudi shola National Park consists of three Shola Reserve Forests namely Pannavan shola, Pullaradi shola and Indivara shola together occupying an area of 42068 Sq.Km.
- It was declared as a National Park in the year of 2003.
- The park provides safe and comfortable habitat to the wild species of flora and fauna.

The rich wildlife includes Elephant, Tiger, Panther, Indian Bison, Nilgiri tahr, Gaur, Spotted Deer, Sambar, Giant Grizzled Squirrel, Hanuman Langur, Sloth Bear, Flying Squirrels etc.





## GOLD ETF



Gold exchange-traded funds (ETFs) in India attracted an inflow of Rs 1,028 crore in August, which was the highest monthly inflow in 16 months. This indicates a significant increase in investor interest and investment in Gold ETFs during that particular month.

**Key Factor responsible for this Increase**

- **US Interest Rates:** The continued hikes in interest rates in the US have had an impact on the global financial markets. Higher interest rates tend to increase the opportunity cost of holding non-interest-bearing assets like gold. As a result, some investors may have shifted their funds from traditional investments to Gold ETFs, which are seen as a haven during times of economic uncertainty.
- **US Economic Growth:** The slowing growth rate in the US, likely influenced by the interest rate hikes, could have made investors more cautious about the stock market and other riskier assets. Gold is often considered a hedge against economic uncertainty, so investors may have turned to Gold ETFs to protect their portfolios.
- **Global Geopolitical Tensions:** Geopolitical events often create uncertainty in financial markets, leading investors to seek safe-haven assets like gold.
- **Inflation Hedge:** Gold is often used as a hedge against inflation. With inflation rates higher than expected, investors may have turned to Gold ETFs as a way to preserve their purchasing power.
- **Fundamentals of Gold:** Gold prices had come off their all-time highs, providing a buying opportunity for investors. After a sharp rally earlier in the year, gold may have seemed more attractive at lower price levels.
- **Market Sentiment:** Investor sentiment and perceptions of the economic environment can play a significant role in the demand for gold. Positive sentiment towards gold and its prospects can drive inflows into Gold ETFs.
- **Gold's Track Record:** Gold's strong performance in recent years may have attracted investor interest and confidence in the asset class, leading to higher inflows.

### Gold Exchange Traded Funds (Gold ETFs)

- Gold Exchange Traded Funds (Gold ETFs) are a popular investment option that provides exposure to the price of gold without the need to physically own and store the precious metal.
- **Commodity-Based ETF:** Gold ETFs are a type of commodity-based exchange-traded fund, with their primary underlying asset being gold. This means that the value of the ETF is directly linked to the price of gold.
- **Passive Investment:** Gold ETFs are passive investment instruments. They do not actively manage a portfolio of assets but instead aim to replicate the performance of gold prices. This passive approach helps keep management fees relatively low.
- **Ownership of Physical Gold:** Gold ETFs hold physical gold bullion as their underlying asset. Each unit of a Gold ETF represents a specific quantity of physical gold, typically equivalent to 1 gram of gold. This gold can be held in either paper or dematerialized (electronic) form.
- **Liquidity and Flexibility:** Gold ETF units are listed and traded on stock exchanges, just like individual stocks. Investors can buy and sell Gold ETF units throughout the trading day at prevailing market prices, providing liquidity and ease of access.

- **Transparency:** Gold ETFs offer complete transparency regarding their holdings. Since their value is directly tied to the current price of physical gold, investors can easily verify the ETF's asset backing.
- **Cost-Effective:** Investing in Gold ETFs is often more cost-effective compared to buying physical gold. Investors are not responsible for expenses related to storing, insuring, and transporting physical gold. Additionally, the management fees for Gold ETFs are usually relatively low.
- **Diversification:** Gold ETFs allow investors to diversify their portfolios by adding exposure to gold, which can act as a hedge against economic uncertainties and inflation.
- **Tax Efficiency:** Depending on the jurisdiction and tax laws, Gold ETFs may offer tax advantages compared to owning physical gold.
- **Accessibility:** Gold ETFs provide an accessible way for a wide range of investors, including retail investors, to invest in gold without the barriers associated with purchasing and storing physical gold.
- **Risk Factors:** While Gold ETFs offer several advantages, they are not entirely risk-free. The value of the ETF can still be influenced by factors like changes in the gold market, currency fluctuations, and management expenses. Additionally, like all investments, they are subject to market risk.

## SIMULTANEOUS POLLS



The Union government established a committee led by former President of India Ram Nath Kovind to examine the feasibility of simultaneous elections in the country. The committee includes prominent members such as Union Home Minister Amit Shah, former Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, and others.



- The committee will explore the concept of "one nation, one election" and make recommendations for holding simultaneous elections to State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha.
- **Terms of Reference for the Committee:** The Law Ministry has provided seven terms of reference for the committee. One of these terms of reference is to examine and recommend whether constitutional amendments are required to enable simultaneous elections and if these amendments necessitate ratification by the States.
- The Indian Constitution was designed to be adaptable to changing circumstances. Article 368 of the Constitution governs the process of amending it. **Amendments can be made through three different procedures:**
  - **Simple Majority:** Some provisions can be amended in the same way as ordinary legislation, with a simple majority of those present and voting in each house of Parliament.
  - **Special Majority:** For amendments not falling under the first category, a 'special majority' is required, which means a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting in each house and a majority of the total membership of each house.
  - **Ratification by States:** A third category of amendments demands a 'special majority' in Parliament and ratification by at least one-half of the State legislatures. While there's no specific time limit for ratification, resolutions must be passed by State legislatures before the amending bill is presented to the President for assent.
- **Provisions Requiring Ratification by States:** These provisions, known as 'entrenched provisions,' pertain to the federal structure of the Constitution. They include changes related to presidential elections, the distribution of powers between the Union and States, alterations to the Lists in the Seventh Schedule, changes in the representation of States in Parliament, and amendments to Article 368 itself.
- **Time Limit for Ratification:** Unlike the U.S. Constitution, the Indian Constitution doesn't specify a time limit for ratification. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that ratification should occur within a 'reasonable time,' a matter that may depend on social, political, and economic factors.
- **Law Commission's Report:** In 2018, the Law Commission of India, issued a report suggesting that simultaneous elections would require constitutional amendments and the consent of at least 50% of states. However, implementing these recommendations without infringing on the federal structure is a challenge.

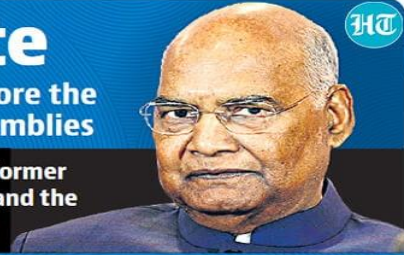


# Reviving an old debate

Centre has said a committee has been formed to explore the possibility of simultaneous polls for LS and state assemblies

## PANEL FORMED

While the panel is likely going to be headed by former **PRESIDENT RAM NATH KOVIND**, its composition and the terms of its functioning will be announced soon



## WHAT HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT THE IDEA

### NITI AAYOG

A 2016 paper, co-authored by Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai, noted....

- Separate elections lead to massive recurring expenditures as well as prolonged deployment of forces
- It suggested holding elections in two cycles with an interregnum of 30 months
- It pegged cost of simultaneous polls at **₹4,500 crore**, while the cost of 2014 Lok Sabha polls alone was **₹3,870 crore**

### STANDING COMMITTEE

In 2015, the House panel on personnel, public grievances, law and justice said...

- Elections could be held in two phases
- Polls to some assemblies can be held in Lok Sabha midterm and remaining assemblies could be held at the end of Lok Sabha term

### LAW COMMISSION

In 1999, the Law Commission in its 170th report on Reform of Electoral Laws said...

- Holding simultaneous polls would be ideal, but a workable formula is required to be in the Constitution
- The holding of a separate election to assemblies should be an exception and not the rule
- Another law panel report, in 2018, said simultaneous polls don't alter balance of power between Union and the states



## Simultaneous polls

### About

- **Simultaneous polls, also known as "One Nation, One Election,"** refer to the practice of holding elections for the Lok Sabha (the lower house of India's Parliament) and all state legislative assemblies at the same time, rather than at different intervals as is the current practice.
- Simultaneous polls have been a topic of discussion in India for several decades. The primary motivation behind this idea is to reduce the frequency of elections, which can be resource-intensive and often disrupt governance. The idea gained prominence in recent years due to the perception that frequent elections lead to policy paralysis and increased expenditure.
- The Indian Constitution does not explicitly mention simultaneous elections. Currently, elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies are held separately and are subject to the provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

### Significances

#### Reduced Expenditure

- **Financial Savings:** Conducting elections is an expensive affair. There are costs associated with organizing polling stations, deploying security personnel, printing ballot papers, and conducting voter awareness campaigns. By holding multiple elections simultaneously, these costs can be significantly reduced. Fewer election cycles mean less expenditures on the logistics and administration of the electoral process.
- **Resource Optimization:** Simultaneous elections also optimize the use of government resources. For instance, government employees and security forces can be utilized more efficiently when they are involved in election-related duties for a shorter duration.



## Stability

- **Political Stability:** Simultaneous elections can contribute to political stability. In many democracies, frequent elections can lead to a state of perpetual campaign mode, where political parties are constantly focused on election strategies rather than governing effectively. This can lead to policy paralysis and governance challenges. Fixed, synchronized election cycles can mitigate this issue, allowing governments to focus on policymaking and governance without the distraction of impending elections.
- **Reduced Mid-term Elections:** In countries with multiple levels of government (e.g., local, state, and national), staggered election cycles can result in mid-term elections that disrupt the political landscape. These mid-term elections can be costly and may lead to frequent changes in government. Simultaneous elections reduce the likelihood of mid-term polls, providing more stability and allowing elected officials to complete their full terms.

## Enhanced Governance

- **Policy Implementation:** Frequent elections can impede the long-term planning and implementation of policies and projects. Elected officials may hesitate to make tough decisions that could impact their electoral prospects. Simultaneous elections, by providing a stable tenure, allow governments to undertake reforms and policy initiatives that may not yield immediate electoral benefits but are in the long-term interest of the nation.
- **Administrative Efficiency:** Simultaneous elections also streamline the administrative process. Government machinery can be better utilized when elections are held concurrently. Public servants are not constantly transitioning between election-related duties and regular administrative work, which can lead to more efficient governance.

## Challenges associated with implementing simultaneous elections

### Constitutional Amendments

- **Altering State Assembly Terms:** To implement simultaneous elections, the terms of state legislative assemblies and the Lok Sabha (the lower house of India's Parliament) would need to be synchronized. Currently, state assemblies have different terms, and this would require amending various provisions of the Constitution, including Article 83 (dealing with the duration of the Lok Sabha) and Article 172 (dealing with the duration of state legislative assemblies).
- **Legal and Procedural Changes:** Apart from altering the terms, various other constitutional provisions and laws would need to be amended to facilitate simultaneous elections. This includes changes in the representation of states in the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of Parliament) and electoral laws governing the conduct of elections.

### Logistical Challenges

- **Geographical Diversity:** India is geographically diverse, with varying levels of development, infrastructure, and accessibility. Conducting elections simultaneously across this vast country poses significant logistical challenges, including setting up polling booths, transporting election materials, and ensuring the security of voters and polling personnel.
- **Resource Allocation:** Simultaneous elections would require a substantial increase in resources, such as electronic voting machines, security personnel, and election officials.

Allocating these resources efficiently and equitably across all constituencies can be a daunting task.

### Political Consensus

- **Diverse Political Landscape:** India has a multi-party political system with various parties representing different regions, ideologies, and interests. Convincing all political parties to agree on the idea of simultaneous elections is a formidable challenge, as each party may have its calculations and reservations.
- **Fear of Dominance:** Some smaller or regional parties may fear that simultaneous elections could lead to the dominance of national parties, potentially marginalizing their representation in state assemblies or the Lok Sabha.
- **Constitutional Amendments:** The process of amending the Constitution requires a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament, which necessitates political consensus. Gaining such consensus can be challenging when parties have differing priorities and agendas.

### Way forward

- **Continue Dialogue:** Continuing discussions with all stakeholders is a critical first step in any decision-making process. It allows for the exchange of ideas, concerns, and perspectives from different parties involved. Seeking consensus is important for building broad-based support for any major policy change.
- **Constitutional Amendments:** If consensus is reached through dialogue, pursuing necessary constitutional amendments is a logical next step. In many countries, the timing and frequency of elections are enshrined in the constitution. Changing this would require formal legal changes, and it's a complex process that often requires a supermajority or other specific conditions.
- **Pilot Projects:** Implementing simultaneous elections on a pilot basis in a few states or regions can be a practical approach to assess the feasibility and address any challenges that may arise. Pilot projects allow for real-world testing and can provide valuable data and insights before full-scale implementation.

## Matsya 6000



## About Matsya 6000

The National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT) in Chennai created the manned submersible vehicle. It was created as part of the Samudrayaan program to help humanity explore mineral resources in the deep ocean. It would make India one of just six countries (the United States, Russia, Japan, France, and China) to have piloted a crewed undersea expedition deeper than 5,000 meters.

## Mission Objectives

Its goals will be to investigate chemosynthetic biodiversity in hydrothermal vents and low-temperature methane seeps in the ocean. It will also promote ocean literacy and tourism.

## Features

- It is meant to function in the deep water for 12 hours, but it can also run for up to 96 hours in an emergency, with all the necessary human safety procedures.
- It is made of an 80mm thick titanium alloy and can withstand pressures 600 times greater than at sea level.
- It is powered solely by gravity, water, and lithium-ion batteries.
- The ultra-short baseline acoustic positioning system (USBL) will also be included. This allows the mothership carrying the transponder to send information and the submersible to respond, informing the mothership of the submersible's location.
- This is a flotation device that will rise to the surface of the water, assisting in the recovery of the submersible even if it is unable to resurface.

## Facts about the Samudrayaan Mission:

- It is India's first manned deep-sea exploration mission.
- It is intended to explore deep ocean resources as well as conduct biodiversity surveys.
- Because the submersible is only used for exploration, the mission will have little impact on the environment.
- The project is part of the wider Deep Ocean Mission, which supports the Blue Economy strategy of the Central Government.
- The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) is the nodal ministry in charge of putting this multi-institutional ambitious mission into action.

## BIMA SUGAM PORTAL

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has established a steering committee to oversee the creation of the Bima Sugam platform, a comprehensive online insurance marketplace.

## Key details about the Bima Sugam project

The Bima Sugam platform aims to simplify the process of buying insurance policies and accessing insurance-related services by offering a one-stop solution for consumers and industry stakeholders. The project's implementation has faced delays, with the regulator setting a new deadline for the platform to go live in July 2024.





The platform is designed to provide easy access to insurance products and services for individuals, including life, health, motor, and property insurance policies, and will serve as a centralized hub for insurance companies, agents, brokers, banks, and aggregators.

The platform will provide a wide range of services, including policy purchase, claim settlement, insurance advice, grievance redressal, and the acceptance of new or sandbox insurance products.

The steering committee responsible for overseeing the project includes members from various insurance companies and industry organizations, ensuring diverse perspectives and expertise.

The platform will support both personal and commercial/business insurance requirements, covering a broad spectrum of insurance products, such as life insurance (term plans, savings, annuity, pension plans), ULIP products, health insurance, vehicle insurance, travel insurance, personal accident insurance, property insurance, commercial insurance, marine insurance, agricultural insurance, and more.

IRDAI plans to appoint a project consultant responsible for the complete ideation, design, and development of the Bima Sugam platform. The consultant will work on creating an easy-to-use interface to help online users access information, make informed policy purchase decisions, and manage their policies efficiently through the platform.