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News: Kavango–Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area

- Recently, the 2024 Heads of State Summit for the Kavango-Zambezi Trans-Frontier Conservation Area (KAZA-TFCA) took place in Livingstone, Zambia, where member states renewed their calls to withdraw from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
- The call came in backdrop of repeated denying of permission to sell off their abundant ivory and other wildlife products.

**Kavango–Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area
(KAZA TFCA)**

- Kavango–Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) is the one of the largest nature and landscape conservation area in the world, spanning the international borders of five countries in Southern Africa.
- It includes a major part of the Upper Zambezi River and Okavango basins and Delta, the Caprivi Strip of Namibia, the southeastern part of Angola, southwestern Zambia, the northern wildlands of Botswana and western Zimbabwe.

- The centre of this area is at the confluence of the Zambezi and Chobe Rivers where the borders of Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe meet. It incorporates a number of notable national parks and nature sites, including Chobe National Park, Hwange National Park, and the Victoria Falls.
- About 70% of KAZA land is under conservation made up of 103 wildlife management areas and 85 forest reserves.
- This region harbours over two-thirds of Africa's elephant population (approx 450,000) with Botswana (132,000) and Zimbabwe (100,000) alone holding significant portions of this population. This is the highest concentration of African Elephants anywhere in the world.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered species of Wild flora and fauna (CITES)

- CITES Convention, also known as **Washington Convention**, is a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**.
- It is administered by **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.
- Headquarters of CITES is located in **Geneva, Switzerland**.
- CITES is in force **since 1st July 1975** when 10 countries ratified the agreement.

- Aim of the convention is to **control or prevent international commercial trade in endangered species or products derived from them.**
- India became a party to the convention in 1976.
- Although CITES is **legally binding** on state parties to the convention it is not self-executing. Parties are **obliged to adopt their own domestic legislation** to implement its goals.
- Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) along with World Customs Organisation; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); Interpol; and World Bank form the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCWC).
- It classifies plants and animals according to three categories, or appendices, based on how threatened. They are:

Appendix I species

- Appendix I list species that are in **danger of extinction**. It **prohibits commercial trade of these plants and animals except in extraordinary situations** for scientific or educational reasons.

Appendix II species

- They are those **that are not threatened with extinction but that might suffer a serious decline in number if the trade is not restricted.** Their trade is regulated by permit.

Appendix III species

- They are **protected in at least one country that is a CITES member state** and that has petitioned others for help in controlling international trade in that species.
- Conference of Parties (CoP) to CITES is **done once in every 3 years.**
- Most recent CoP – **CoP 19 was held in Panama in 2022 and CoP 20 will be held in 2025.**

Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE)

Programme

- Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Programme (MIKE) was established by the CITES by Resolution 10.10 adopted at the tenth Conference of the Parties (CoP) in 1997.
- Mandated by COP resolution of CITES, **Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE)** program started in South Asia in the year 2003 with the

purpose to provide information needed for elephant range States to make appropriate management and enforcement decisions, and to build institutional capacity within the range States for the long-term management of their elephant populations.

- MIKE is a site – based program.

The main objectives of the MIKE are:

- To measure levels and trends in illegal hunting of elephants.
- To determine changes in these trends over time.
- To determine the factors causing or associated with such changes, and to try and assess in particular to what extent observed trends are a result of any decision taken by The Conference of the Parties to CITES.
- MIKE Sites in India are Chirang Ripu (Assam), Dihang Patkai (Assam), Eastern Dooars (WB), Deomali (Arunachal Pradesh), Garo Hills (Meghalaya), Mayurbhanj (Orissa), Mysore (Karnataka), Nilgiri (TN), Shivalik (Uttarakhand) and Wayanad (Kerala).

Asian Elephant

- Also known as **Indian elephant and Asiatic Elephant**, Asian Elephant is the **Natural Heritage Animal of India**.
- Elephants are considered a "**Keystone Species**" as they **play a critical role in maintaining the balance and health of forest ecosystems**.
- They are **known for their exceptional intelligence**, boasting the **largest brain size of any land animal**.
- Indian Elephants are also the **state animals of Jharkhand, Karnataka, and Kerala**.

Significance in Ecosystem

- Elephants are very important **grazers and browsers**, eating vast amounts of **vegetation every day**, spreading seeds around as they go.
- They also **help shape the often-thick vegetation of the Asian landscape**.
- For example, in forests, **elephants create clearings and gaps in the trees that let sunlight in to reach new seedlings**, helping plants grow and the forest to **regenerate naturally**.
- Elephants will also **dig for water when there is not any surface water** – opening **water access for other creatures as well as themselves**.

- Distribution and habitat: Elephants mostly inhabit grasslands, tropical evergreen forests, semi-evergreen forests, moist-deciduous forests, dry deciduous forests and dry thorn forests.

Elephants in India

- India has the largest number of wild Asian Elephants, estimated at 29,964 according to the 2017 census by Project Elephant.
- It is about 60% of the species' global population.
- Karnataka has the highest number of elephants, followed by Assam and Kerala.

Conservation Efforts

- IUCN Status for Asiatic Elephant is endangered. IUCN also classifies African Forest Elephant as Critically Endangered and African Savanna Elephant as Endangered.
- CITES Status for Asiatic Elephant is Appendix I. African Elephants are enlisted in the Appendix II of the same.
- Indian Wildlife protection act enlists Elephant in Schedule I of the Protection Act ensuring maximum protection among animals.
- Included in Appendix I of Convention on Migratory Species at the Gandhinagar Cop of Bonn Convention.

Threats

- **Loss of habitat and Poaching** are the biggest threats faced by the Elephants.