**For 6th Sem (Paper 6.1/ 2016) Prepared by: Mala Moni Kalita**

**Review of the scenario of man elephant conflicts in the state of Assam**

The man-elephant conflict is not a new topic. But in today’s world, this issue is causing serious concern due to loss of human life and property as well as the increasing number of deaths of elephants.

According to a Forest Survey of India report, Assam suffered the maximum loss of forest cover in the entire country including 17 sq km of very dense forest from 2010 to 2011 and 152 sq km of moderately dense forest. Due to various factors, forest patches have undergone significant degradation.

Massive encroachments had taken place in the past times in the name of development and land resettlements. Increasing human population, agricultural expansions, encroachment on forests and consequent habitat and corridor loss of elephants, human interference within the natural habitat and shortage of food and water in the habitat have increased the number of man-elephant conflict incidents.

Unplanned mining of natural resources like sand, gravel/stones and wood logging are also main drivers of the man-elephant conflict. Without any legal protection of the secondary and foraging corridors of elephants, illegal and unplanned developmental activities on these critical elephant corridors are obstructing the free movement of elephants and are important drivers of the man-elephant conflict.

In Assam, every year at least 20-30 persons are losing their lives while a dozen or so elephants are killed in retaliation. In the last year i.e. 2019 the number of human death due to the human-elephant conflict in Assam is reported 32 and the number of reported elephant deaths is 45.

According to data, during 2003 to 2014, total 733 humans were killed by wild elephants in Assam. From 2001 to 2014, a total of 225 wild elephants were killed. This conflict is not going to end as the human population is growing and the habitat available for elephants is shrinking.

The overall population of wild Asian elephants in Assam is around 4,000 and the census figures by the Forest department showed a declining trend. Even if those figures are treated as not accurate, there is no doubt at all that the number is coming down and certainly not going up. This indicates that a sizeable number of poaching go unreported. Many calves die after falling in tea garden drains. Recently cases of disappearance of sub-adult tuskers from herds were also alleged by local conservationist groups near Nambor-Doigrung Wildlife Sanctuary.

Elephants also cause financial loss to farmers and villagers when they raid crop fields and storage houses to feed on rice grains, fruits and other foods. The loss of a season’s harvest is an enormous loss for a poor farmer and repeated crop depredations by elephants have created serious problems in many parts of Assam. Farmers have already stopped cultivating on thousands of hectares of land due to the constant trouble caused by elephants in the crop seasons every year. This may go unnoticed by the majority, but as a whole it has caused negative effect upon the whole agricultural pattern and also the rural economy. Elephants also cause human deaths or injuries during crop/property raiding, movement through human settlements near forests and during accidental encounters.

Shortage of foresters in the forest division, lack of awareness of people and lack of political will are some setbacks that has fuelled the human elephant-man conflict problem in Assam in recent times.

It is obvious that man-elephant conflict in Assam is an outcome of habitat loss and food shortages of wild elephants. This human-elephant conflict may not be stopped fully, but it can be reduced to some extent by adopting some scientific methods for long run. Livelihood alternatives for villagers living in the forest fringe areas and human-elephant conflict zones should be taken. Buffer zones can be created between the natural habitat and settlement area with sufficient drinking water and by planting trees for the elephants.