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Tiger Conservation in Tamil Nadu

Context:

- Despite numerous challenges, **Tamil Nadu has successfully created a safe haven for tigers, particularly in the Nilgiris landscape.**
- **This region boasts the largest tiger population globally**, with significant conservation efforts leading to a marked increase in tiger numbers.

Tiger Population and Conservation Efforts:

- **Population Growth:** Tamil Nadu's tiger population grew from **264 in 2018 to 306 in 2022**, a four-fold increase over two decades.

Conservation Phases:

- **First Phase (1970s):** Introduction of the Wildlife Protection Act and establishment of protected areas.
- **Second Phase (2005-2006):** Adoption of a landscape-level conservation approach with strict monitoring.
- **Policy Changes: Establishment of core and buffer areas, new reserves, and recognition of tiger corridors.**

Performance of Tiger Reserves

Management Effectiveness:

- **Anamalai and Mudumalai Tiger Reserves scored above 90% in the 2022 NTCA assessment.**
- **Sathyamangalam and Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserves** were rated very good, while Srivilliputhur – Megamalai Tiger Reserve was classified as good with a **60.94% score.**

Emerging Concerns:

- **Decreased Occupancy:** Tiger occupancy outside protected areas has decreased, with some areas reporting local extinctions, though disputed by forest officials.
- **Human Footprint:** Increased human activity in the Western Ghats heightens conflicts between humans and wildlife.

Mortality and Management of Invasive Species:

- **Tiger Deaths:** Ten tiger deaths were recorded between August and September 2023, attributed to natural and unnatural causes due to population spillover.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invasive Species: Managing invasive species is a long-term, continuous process critical for preserving native flora and fauna. <p>Re-Wilding Efforts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aborted Attempt: Tamil Nadu's first attempt to re-wild a rescued tiger cub was halted due to feasibility and safety concerns, leading to the tiger's relocation to Vandalur Zoo.
<p>Tamil Nadu Women Summit 2024</p>	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, emphasized the importance of the ideas generated during the conference. • He highlighted Tamil Nadu's leading role in women's empowerment and the various schemes implemented by his government to support women's development. <p>Tamil Nadu's Leadership in Women Empowerment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical Contribution: Recalled the 1989 DMK regime's milestone of granting women equal rights in family property. • Current Initiatives: Highlighted schemes such as the free bus travel scheme, Pudhumai Penn scheme, CM's breakfast scheme, and Thozhi hostels. <p>Achievements and Impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women Workforce: Tamil Nadu has the highest share in India's women workforce. • Entrepreneurial Support: Over 4,400 women-led start-ups registered. Since coming to power, the government has trained 23,431 women to become entrepreneurs. • Financial Assistance: A total of ₹1,056 crore in loans given to 13,473 women entrepreneurs, with ₹366 crore as subsidies. <p>The Hindu's Tamil Nadu Women Summit 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizers and Partners: Organized by The Hindu in association with Guidance Tamil Nadu. Powered by Naga Foods and partnered with various organizations such as Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation, KBR India, Indian Bank, Prestige, and others. • Focus Areas: The summit covered leadership, skill development, entrepreneurship, education, and social transformation.
<p>State-level Transgender Award</p>	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Minister M.K. Stalin of Tamil Nadu recently presented the State-level Transgender Award to



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	<p>Sandhiya Devi, acknowledging her significant contributions to the welfare of the transgender community.</p> <p>Key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sandhiya Devi is a villisai (folk art form) enthusiast who teaches the art to help trans persons earn a livelihood.• She has financially supported a Class IX student's education.• She adopted an eight-year-old child with special needs.• Award Details: The award includes a cheque for ₹1 lakh and a citation.• Award's Purpose: Instituted in 2020 to encourage transpersons for their contributions to community welfare.
<p>Project Tiger and Indigenous Displacement: Key Findings</p>	<p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• On International Tiger Day, the Rights & Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) released a critical report titled “India’s Tiger Reserves: Tribals Get Out, Tourists Welcome.”• The report examines the impact of Project Tiger on indigenous communities, highlighting severe consequences of the conservation initiative. <p>Displacement of Indigenous Communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scope of Displacement: The report alleges that Project Tiger, since its inception in 1973, has led to the displacement of approximately 550,000 Scheduled Tribes (ST) and other forest dwellers.• Recent Trends: Between 2021 and 2017, the displacement rate per tiger reserve increased by 967%, with the addition of six new reserves. This has resulted in about 290,000 people being forcibly removed from their ancestral lands. <p>Violations and Irregularities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forest Rights Act (FRA) Violations: The report accuses Project Tiger of breaching the Forest Rights Act by displacing tribal communities without their consent.• Increased Tiger Deaths: Ironically, tiger deaths have risen due to infrastructure projects such as roads, even as tribes are displaced for conservation purposes. <p>Case Studies and Human Rights Concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kaziranga National Park: The report highlights Kaziranga National Park in Assam as a case of concern, citing a 2014 report that questioned the



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legitimacy of alleged poaching encounters. The report states that between 2014 and 2016, 57 individuals were killed, raising suspicions about the nature of these encounters.

- **Unfounded Displacement:** Five tiger reserves, including Sahyadri, Satkosia, Kamlang, Kawal, and Dampa, have displaced over 5,600 tribal families despite not having a significant tiger population.

Commercialization and Its Impact:

- **Tourism and Infrastructure:** The report criticizes the commercialization of tiger reserves, noting the encroachment of tourism, infrastructure projects, and mining activities into protected areas.
- **Forest Conservation Amendment Act:** The recent amendment is viewed as exacerbating the issue by promoting commercialization under the guise of eco-tourism.

Successful Coexistence Models:

- **Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve:** The report acknowledges the success of the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Tiger Reserve, where the coexistence between tigers and the Soliga tribe has led to a thriving tiger population. The report advocates for this model to be adopted more widely.

Recommendations and Future Directions:

- **Immediate Actions Needed:** The report calls for a halt to current displacements, a comprehensive review of existing tiger reserves, and the adoption of coexistence models that respect the rights of indigenous communities.
- **National Debate:** The findings have sparked a debate on **balancing wildlife conservation with the rights and livelihoods of human populations, urging for a more equitable approach to Project Tiger.**