Human wildlife conflict

Why in News?

Recent human fatalities due to wild animal attacks, deep inside forests, in forest-fringed human habitations, and even within villages, have highlighted growing human-wildlife conflict in Kerala.

What is human wild life conflict?

- **Human-wildlife conflict (HWC)** – It refers to any interaction between humans and wildlife that leads to negative consequences for either party.
- It occurs when wild animals pose a direct threat to human life, livelihoods, or property, and in response, humans take actions that harm wildlife populations or their habitats
- **Recent trend** - Overall, human deaths from wildlife encounters have decreased from 146 in 2018 to 57 last year.
- Many victims are from tribal communities, traditionally adept at coexisting with wildlife.
- **Elephant conflict** - With an estimated population of around 31,000 across 29 reserves, India is home to the largest number of wild Asian elephants globally.
- Tragically, encounters with these majestic creatures result in over 500 human fatalities annually.
- **Elephant death** - More than 100 elephants succumb to human-induced activities such as encroachments, mining, quarrying, ivory poaching, poisoning, encounters with electric fences, and collisions with trains.
- **Tiger conflict** - India is home to more than 2,960 tigers — 75 per cent of the world's wild tiger population.

What are the causes of human wild life conflict?

- **Habitat loss & fragmentation** - Deforestation, urban expansion, and agricultural encroachment force animals into human settlements.
- Frequent crop raiding and property damage due to shrinking forest cover.
- **Climate change** - Altered weather patterns impact food and water availability, leading wildlife to move into human areas.
- Rising sea levels force tigers into human settlements.
- **Human encroachment** - Expanding infrastructure like roads and dams disrupts wildlife corridors.
- Increased leopards sightings in urban areas due to habitat fragmentation.
- **Food scarcity** - Overgrazing, monoculture farming, and depletion of natural prey drive animals to seek alternative food sources in human areas.
- **Invasive species** - Non-native species like Senna spectabilis disrupt wildlife feeding

patterns, ecosystems balance and increases competition for resources.

What are the impacts of Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC)?

- **Loss of human life and injuries** - Attacks by elephants, leopards, and snakes lead to fatalities and severe injuries.
- **Crop and livestock damage** - Animals like wild boars, elephants, and nilgai destroy crops, affecting farmers' livelihoods.
- **Infrastructure damage** - Elephants and other large animals damage houses, roads, and power lines.
- **Threat to conservation efforts** - Conflict creates negative perceptions of wildlife, reducing local support for conservation.
- **Economic losses** - Farmers face financial losses due to crop destruction and livestock predation.
- Governments spend crores on compensation and mitigation measures.
- **Psychological and social impact** - Fear of wildlife attacks causes stress and anxiety in rural communities which lead to retaliatory killings of animals.
- **Biodiversity and ecological imbalance** - Retaliatory killings disrupt food chains and ecosystems.

Why did kerala classified HWC as a State-Specific Disaster?

Kerala is the first state to classify HWC as a state-specific disaster under the Disaster Management Act, 2005.

- **Faster relief** - Victims get quick financial aid from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF).
- **Better coordination** - Forest, Disaster Management, Revenue, and Local Departments work together to handle conflicts.
- **Stronger prevention** - Funds support solar fencing, elephant-proof trenches, and habitat conservation.
- **Improved compensation** - HWC victims get faster payouts, including for crop and livestock losses.
- **Community involvement** - Locals are included in disaster plans and encouraged to adopt eco-friendly development.

What are the steps taken by the indian government to address HWC?

- **Policy framework and guidelines** - National Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Strategy and Action Plan provides a structured approach to reduce HWC across India.
- **Regulation** - The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 provides regulatory functions for dealing with human wildlife conflict situations.
- **Species-specific guidelines** - In 2023, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) released 14 guidelines to address conflicts involving elephants, leopards, snakes, and other species.
- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** - The government has issued SOPs to

manage encounters with tigers and leopards, ensuring effective and timely responses.

- **Habitat development** - Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats, Project Tiger, and Project Elephant' provide financial assistance to states for habitat improvement and conflict mitigation.
- **Compensation mechanisms** - The government provides compensation for human casualties, livestock predation, and crop damage caused by wildlife.
- **Community engagement and capacity building** - States like West Bengal and Assam have set up special squads to prevent wildlife intrusions into human settlements.
- **Public awareness programs** - The 'Gaj Yatra' campaign by the Wildlife Trust of India (with MoEFCC) spreads awareness about human-elephant conflict mitigation.
- **Habitat conservation and restoration** - Establishment of protected area network like national parks, sanctuaries, conservation reserves, and community reserves to safeguard wildlife.
- **Habitat enrichment** - Efforts include improving water and fodder availability within Protected Areas to prevent wildlife from straying into human settlements.
- **Early Warning Systems** - The 'Surakshya' mobile app in Odisha notifies locals about elephant movements, helping prevent conflicts.

What can be done?

- Emphasise participatory forest and wildlife management.
- Document and assess the traditional knowledge of Kerala's 36 tribal communities in tackling wildlife encounters.
- Given the region-specific nature of the problem, a multi-agency approach involving the Disaster Management, Revenue, Local Self-Government, Tribal Welfare, Agriculture, Health and Forest Departments is crucial to balancing human safety and sustainable wildlife management.
- Promotion of crops in forest fringe areas which are unpalatable to wild animals.
- Agro forestry models which include cash crops like chillies, lemon grass, khus grass etc. suitably mixed with tree/shrub species.

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