Human Animal Conflict - Pilibhit Tiger Reserve

What is the issue?

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Traditional elements of man-animal conflict along with some site-specific triggers in Pilibhit have made this young tiger reserve one of the worst conflict zones.

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How prevalent is the conflict?

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- In Pilibhit tiger reserve in Uttar Pradesh, tigers have killed 6 people over the last 3 months.
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- This is a new high even for this notorious conflict zone.
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- Tadoba (Maharashtra) and Pilibhit are the two reserves that saw the bulk of the recent deadly attacks.
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- Sunderbans (West Bengal) and Corbett(Uttarkhand) are other notable conflict zones.
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What are the reasons?

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- **Visibility -** Unlike elephants that occupy huge space and resources and are easy to spot, the big cats are good at avoiding people and often go invisible.
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- **Land Use Pattern -** A drastic change in land use is evident in most of the conflict zones. e.g –\n
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    1. Huge influx of settlers in Sunderbans due to various historical reasons.
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    2. Fisherfolk ventured deep into the channels of the Sunderbans, while

honey-collectors delved into the mangrove clusters.
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3. Large scale deforestation in Pilibhit for firewood and fodder added to the causes.
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- **Local reasons -** In Pilibhit, the conflict was further exacerbated by the reckless farming choices made by the local community.
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- Farmland at the immediate edge of a forest creates an illusion of extended habitat for the wildlife.
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- Pilibhit's widespread sugarcane fields and the choice of sugarcane and rice as prime crops have brought tigers and people dangerously close due to the absence of a functional buffer area.
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- Riverbed (boulder) miners set up colonies for migrant labourers who start intruding into the tiger reserve in Corbett.
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- Frequent human activities for long time inside the tiger forests greatly increase the chances of accidental encounters with the big cats.
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What could be done?

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- The bulk of human casualties occur in just a few pockets of acute conflict.
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- Setting up of **Wildlife corridors** to absorb surplus cats from crowded reserves to tiger-deficient forests could be an option.
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- A safer land use model and practical crop selection can avoid tigers getting confused with standing crops for their extended habitat.
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- Instead of fencing, strategic and limited physical restrictions in the reserves in terms of human habitation could help avoid points of conflict more efficiently.
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Source: The Indian Express

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