Pros and Cons of Tiger Safari in India

Why in news?

Recently Supreme Court bans tiger safari in core areas of Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand.

What is tiger safari?

- A "tiger safari" typically refers to a designated area within or near a tiger reserve where visitors can observe tigers and other wildlife in their natural habitat.
- **NTCA,2012**- The concept of a tiger safari in the wild was first envisaged in the Guidelines for Tourism issued by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in 2012, which provided for such establishments in the buffer areas of tiger reserves.
- **Guidelines evolution**- In 2016, the NTCA issued guidelines for Tiger Safaris specifically for injured, conflicted, or orphaned tigers, emphasizing that tigers should not be sourced from zoos.

  The guidelines said that a tiger safari can be proposed only by tiger reserves that have already utilised 100% of their tourist carrying capacity.

- **Central Zoo Authority (CZA)-** A significant change occurred in 2019 when NTCA permitted zoos to provide animals for tiger safaris, with the CZA being responsible for animal selection.
- **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**- It does not explicitly define tiger safari, the act states that no construction of commercial tourist lodges, hotels, zoos, and safari parks shall be undertaken inside a sanctuary except with the prior approval of the National Board constituted under the Act.

Pros of tiger safari	Cons of tiger safari

• **Reduce tourism pressure-** Establishing safari parks in buffer areas can provide an alternative attraction for tourists, thereby reducing the number of visitors within the core areas of the reserve • **Provide sanctuary for unfit animals-** Safari parks offer a solution by providing a controlled environment within the natural surroundings of the reserve for injured, orphaned or conflicted tigers that may not be fit for release into the wild. • **Support local livelihoods-** Safari parks can serve as a source of income and employment for these communities through tourism-related activities such as guiding, hospitality, and souvenir sales. • **Economy development-** The Pakharau safari park near the Corbett Tiger Reserve is seen as a means to distribute the economic benefits of tiger tourism more evenly, as the Ramnagar area has previously reaped most rewards.	• **Increased tourism demand**- Efforts to distribute tourist demand by opening new safari routes have not decreased vehicle crowding but have attracted more tourists. • **Display of rescued tigers**-The practice of displaying rescued tigers in safari parks deviates from the previous approach of keeping them in non-display facilities. • **Against the guidelines**-The 2016 NTCA guidelines required an assessment of each recovered or treated animal before they could be displayed in safari parks. • **Habitat disturbance**- Safari parks within tiger reserves may prioritize individual welfare at the expense of species interest, potentially causing disturbances in wild habitats. • **Ranthambore safari park**- It was launched in 2016, it is raising concerns about structural integrity of enclosures and the stress on wildlife caused by introducing zoo animals into wild habitat. • **Wildlife stress**- The introduction of captive animals into safari parks within protected forests has led to stress and aggression among resident territorial species as observed with leopards in Nahargarh Biological Park, Rajasthan.

What is the Supreme Court's view on tiger safari?

- **Illegal tree felling-**The Court criticized the Uttarakhand State government for the illegal felling of over 6,053 trees for the Pakhrau Tiger Safari, citing a Central Empowered Committee report.
- **Complete investigation**-The court also gave CBI three months to complete its investigation into alleged irregularities inside the Corbett tiger reserve, as directed by the Uttarakhand High Court.
- **Tiger safari rules**- The tiger safari would now be allowed only in the peripheral and buffer zones of the Jim Corbett National Park.
- The Court said it was inclined to approve the establishment of the Tiger Safari at Pakhrau" in the buffer area of Corbett tiger reserve.
- However, safari parks are meant only for "injured, conflicted, or orphaned" local tigers, and not those sourced from zoos.
- **Create a committee**- The Supreme Court has ordered the formation of a committee to suggest ways to repair ecological damage in Jim Corbett National Park caused by illegal construction and tree felling *within 3 months*.
- **Role of committee**-The committee will assess environmental damage, identify responsible officers, recommend restoration measures, and evaluate the feasibility of tiger safaris in buffer areas, keeping ecocentrism in mind.

What lies ahead?

- The Supreme Court's stance aligns with conservation goals, indicating that tiger safaris should not simply be zoos within tiger reserves which reflects a commitment to maintaining the *integrity of wild habitats* and prioritizing the well-being of wild tiger populations.
- It is essential for authorities to carefully consider *site-specific factors* and develop guidelines that balance conservation objectives with the needs of local communities and the welfare of wildlife.
- The establishment of tiger safari parks should not become a routine practice but rather be proposed based on careful evaluation of carrying capacity and other ecological factors within each tiger reserve.

References

1. Indian Express- Safari parks a double edged sword
2. Indian Express- SC set up panel to look into tiger safari