

1. India's Tiger Prey Base: Why Their Decline Is a Concern**Introduction**

A recent assessment has, for the first time, measured the abundance of ungulates—hoofed mammals like deer, pigs, antelopes, and bison—across India. These animals are crucial not only for the survival of tigers, India's top predator, but also for maintaining healthy forest ecosystems.

Key Role of Ungulates in Forests and Tiger Conservation

Ungulates form the main diet of tigers and other large carnivores. Their feeding habits also help maintain soil and forest health. India is home to over 3,600 tigers, nearly 70% of the global population. A decline in the prey population directly threatens tiger conservation and forest balance.

Findings from the 2022 Tiger Estimation

The report, based on the 2022 All-India Tiger Estimation, was prepared by the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Wildlife Institute of India. It used field surveys, camera traps, and dung analysis to assess the density and distribution of tiger prey.

Uneven Distribution Across India

While spotted deer, sambar, and gaur thrive in many parts of India, their numbers are declining in east-central states like Odisha, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh due to:

- Habitat destruction
- Mining and infrastructure development
- Subsistence hunting
- Forest fragmentation
- Left-wing extremism

In contrast, forests in Uttarakhand, the Western Ghats, and parts of northeast and central India have healthy populations.

Isolated and Endangered Species

Some ungulate species like barasingha, wild buffalo, hog deer, and pygmy hog are now found only in fragmented pockets. This isolation has caused genetic bottlenecks and reduced interbreeding.

Sanctuaries and forest divisions near tiger reserves have fewer prey animals than protected national parks and tiger reserves.

Status of Major Prey Species

- Chital (Spotted Deer): Most abundant and widely spread across India.
- Sambar: Stable populations, especially in the Western Ghats and central India.
- Wild Pig: Thriving across many landscapes due to high adaptability.
- Nilgai and Gaur: Doing well in several areas. Nilgai often move into farmland; gaur prefer dense forests.

Declining Species with Narrow Habitats

- Hog Deer: Habitat loss in grasslands and wetlands has reduced them to small areas in the Ganga and Brahmaputra plains.
- Barasingha (Swamp Deer): Survives only in places like Kanha, Dudhwa, and Kaziranga. Reintroduction efforts exist but are limited by its dependency on wetland-grassland ecosystems.

Why Prey Decline Threatens Tigers

The decline of ungulates leads to:

1. Reduced Tiger Habitat: Without enough prey, tigers cannot expand to new areas.
2. Human-Wildlife Conflict: Tigers hunt livestock in buffer zones, leading to retaliation by humans.
3. Ecosystem Imbalance: Forests suffer when prey species are absent.
4. Overcrowded Reserves: States like Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh are reaching their wildlife "carrying capacity," pushing tigers into prey-poor states like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

Other Challenges to Wildlife

- Crop Damage: Nilgai and wild pigs destroy crops, adding tension between humans and wildlife.
- Habitat Conversion: Grasslands and wetlands are turning into farms and towns.
- Infrastructure Fragmentation: Roads, railways, and power lines cut through forests, affecting prey movement and survival.

What Needs to Be Done

The report recommends increasing prey populations through protected on-site breeding and improving habitat connectivity. This will not only support tiger conservation but also help reduce human-animal conflict and maintain forest health.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

2. Bengaluru Stampede Tragedy: What Went Wrong and How to Stay Safe

Celebration Turns into Tragedy

Just a day after Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) won their first-ever IPL title, joy turned into mourning. A stampede outside Bengaluru's M. Chinnaswamy Stadium during a felicitation event left 11 people dead and over 50 injured. The chaos unfolded as fans rushed to see the team, especially star player Virat Kohli.



Many fans believed the event was open to the public, while others were told entry was by invitation only. Confusion, overcrowding, and

poor crowd control turned the celebration into a deadly disaster. The primary cause of death was asphyxia — people couldn't breathe in the overcrowded space.

What Caused the Stampede?

- Conflicting messages: RCB announced an open-bus parade, while police said it wouldn't happen.
- Poor crowd control: Authorities failed to manage the massive crowd near key city areas.
- Lack of communication: People weren't clearly told where to go or how to attend.
- Inadequate security: There weren't enough police or staff to control the situation.
- Gate mismanagement: Gates were shut after the venue filled, but the crowd kept pushing.

A judicial inquiry has been announced, and senior police officials have been suspended. But the deeper issue is neglect of crowd safety in public events.

How to Stay Safe in a Stampede: 6 Life-Saving Tips

1. Be Aware in Crowds

Always be alert in large gatherings like festivals, concerts, or sports events. Look for:

- Exit routes
- Movement of the crowd
- Narrow or blocked pathways

If you feel things getting tense or the crowd is building rapidly, it's time to move out.

2. Leave Early if It Feels Unsafe

Don't wait for panic to start. If you feel uncomfortable, leave immediately. The earlier you react, the easier it is to escape.

Crowd disasters often happen when people ignore early warning signs. Trust your instincts.

3. Stay on Your Feet

Falling during a stampede can be fatal. If you fall, it's very hard to get back up because of the pressure of the crowd.

If someone near you falls, try to help them up — this can prevent a domino effect where many others fall too.

4. Move With the Crowd, Not Against It

Trying to fight the crowd can tire you and cause you to lose balance. Instead:

- Go with the flow of the crowd
- Avoid sudden or jerky movements
- Think like a surfer riding a wave

This will help you stay upright and in control.

5. Protect Your Chest and Keep Breathing

Most stampede deaths are caused by suffocation. Here's how to stay safe:

- Put your arms in front of your chest to protect your lungs
- Avoid screaming or wasting breath

- If you fall and can't get up, lie on your stomach with your hands under your chest to keep breathing space

6. Don't Panic — Help Each Other

Panic spreads quickly and makes things worse. Instead:

- Stay calm
- Cooperate with people around you
- Help others stay on their feet

During the Bengaluru incident, a few people formed a human chain to help others — an act that likely saved lives.

Final Thought: Fans Deserve Better

The Bengaluru tragedy shows that fans — who are the heart of any sport — are often neglected when it comes to planning and safety. Crowd safety must become a priority, with:

- Clear communication
- Proper planning
- Adequate policing

Without these, such preventable tragedies will keep happening.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Disaster Management

Source: The Hindu & Indian Express

3. The Train to Kashmir: A Historic Journey Begins

Gamechanger for Kashmir's Future

On June 7, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off two Vande Bharat trains connecting Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra and Srinagar, marking a historic moment for Jammu and Kashmir. This direct rail link is expected to transform trade, tourism, and development in the Valley and bring it closer to the rest of India.

The Long Road to Connectivity

- The first railway in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was built in 1897 between Jammu and Sialkot.
- In the early 1900s, a line between Rawalpindi and Srinagar was proposed but never built.
- After Partition in 1947, Jammu lost its rail link when Sialkot became part of Pakistan.
- For decades, the nearest railway station was in Pathankot, Punjab, until the Pathankot–Jammu line opened in 1975.

Birth of the USBRL Project

- In 1983, work began on the Jammu–Udhampur railway line, which took 21 years to complete.
- In 1994, the government announced its extension to Srinagar and Baramulla.
- This became the Udhampur–Srinagar–Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL), approved in 1995 with a cost estimate of ₹2,500 crore.
- The project was declared a national project in 2002, and various sections were completed over the years.

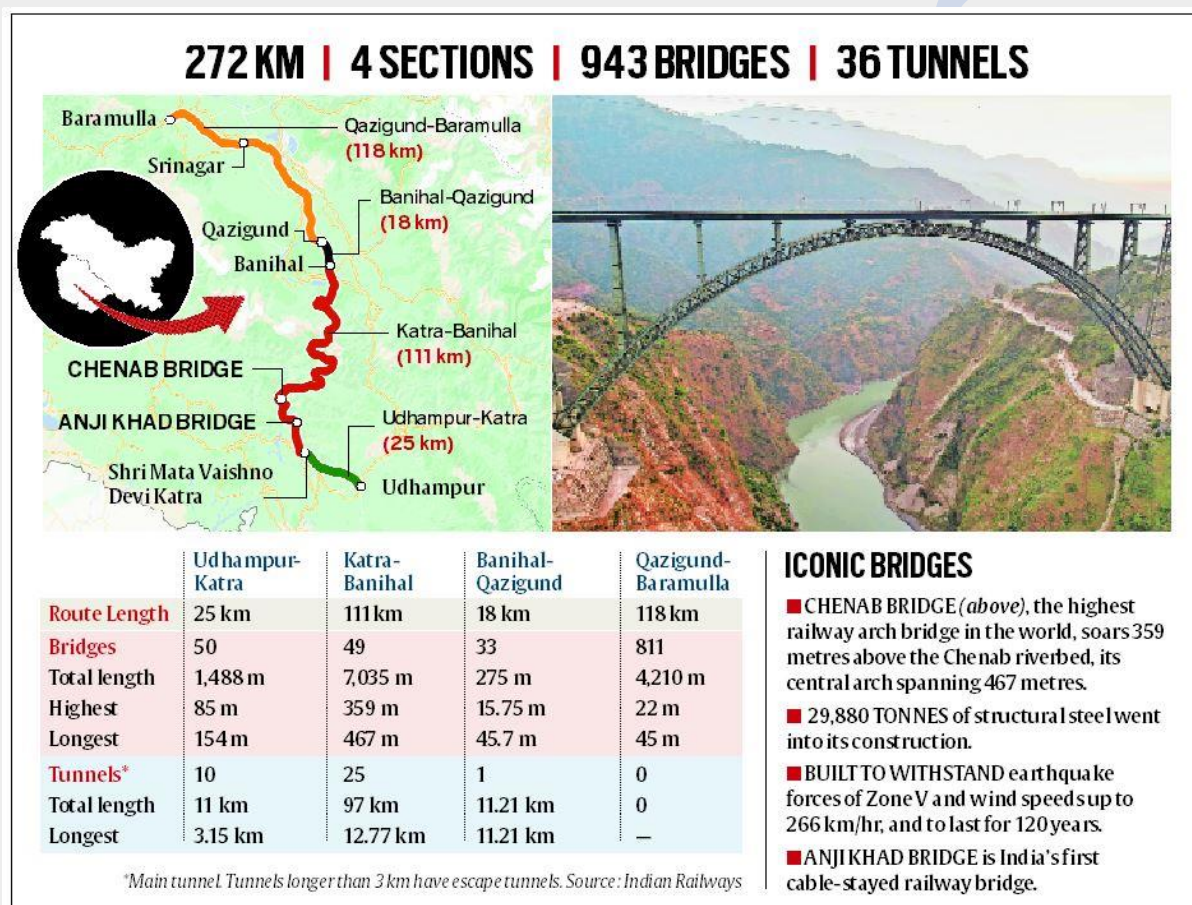
A Mega Engineering Achievement

The USBRL is now complete:

- 272 km of track built
- 36 tunnels and 943 bridges
- Total cost: ₹43,780 crore
- Travel time between Katra and Srinagar: just 3 hours

Key Highlights:

- Chenab Bridge: World's highest railway arch bridge at 359 meters above riverbed
- Anji Khad Bridge: Indian Railways' first cable-stayed bridge
- Ramban Tunnel: India's longest transport tunnel at 12.77 km.



Train Service Details

- Two Vande Bharat trains will run daily in both directions.
- Travel time is cut in half compared to road travel.
- The trains will operate year-round, even in winter, ensuring all-weather connectivity.
- Soon, trains will be extended to Jammu Tawi, enabling people from across India to reach Srinagar directly.

Economic and Social Impact

Boost to Tourism

- Easy access to the Valley is expected to significantly increase tourist footfall, benefiting the local economy.

Trade and Transport

- Faster and cheaper transport of apples, pashmina shawls, handicrafts, dry fruits, and other local goods.
- Lower costs for bringing essential items to the Valley from other parts of India.

A New Chapter for Kashmir

The completion of the USBRL is not just an infrastructure milestone — it's a step toward economic upliftment, social integration, and national connectivity for Jammu and Kashmir. It stands as a symbol of unity, progress, and the power of engineering in bridging distances, both geographical and emotional.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

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