



TATHASTU
Institute Of Civil Services

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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TATHASTU
Institute Of Civil Services

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S.NO. TOPIC

1. INDIA NEEDS A GLOBALLY RECOGNISED PUBLIC SCHOOL
2. A JUMBO CRISIS IN MADHYA PRADESH

INDIA NEEDS A GLOBALLY RECOGNISED PUBLIC SCHOOL

India needs a globally recognised public policy school

Why is it that the world's largest democracy has yet to produce a world-class public policy institution? The United States and Europe boast of institutions such as the John F. Kennedy School of Government (Harvard Kennedy School) and the London School of Economics which train leaders who shape not only national but global governance. Yet, India, with its complex democratic structure and urgent developmental challenges, sends its finest to be trained abroad. This is not for lack of policy schools – India has many – but it has to do with the structure of India's political and institutional landscape.

The executive has the reins

Public policy institutions thrive only when they influence power and decision-making. However, in India, there are limited access points for public policy commentators, academics, and civil society groups to influence policy. This is because much of the decision-making power is vested in the executive and operationalised primarily through the political elite, government officials and bureaucrats rather than through a deliberative legislative process. The oversight role of the legislature over the executive too is limited, leading to a fundamentally different policy ecosystem than in other major democracies.

In the U.S., Congress' power to craft legislation independently of the executive creates space for a thriving policy ecosystem based on analysis, debate, and expertise, with each public representative providing a possible entry point into the deliberative process. This decentralised process sustains a vibrant ecosystem of policy schools, think tanks, and advocacy groups, that can secure funding and find paying clients because their analysis and expertise can meaningfully influence lawmaking.

But in India, the centralisation of power within the executive – and of party leadership within political parties – diminishes the influence of these groups unless they have access to top leadership and are aligned with their political



Ruchi Gupta
Executive Director of the Future of India Foundation

The structure of India's political and institutional landscape is why there is no such school till now

priorities. The weak formalisation of the Indian state further creates a disconnect between politics and policy, relegating policy discourse to a downstream role rather than making it a constituent of the larger political platform. Consequently policy professionals lack the top-tier influence of other countries.

The power factor and where the wind blows

Further, influence on decision-making is closely tied to who is in power. The executive's ability to realign the public sphere when power changes hands is more extreme in India than in more institutionalised democracies. This creates fragility in public life, where those central to decision-making can find themselves sidelined when regimes change. In more institutionalised democracies, think tanks, media and civil society groups can maintain relative influence regardless of who is in power, which helps stabilise the policy ecosystem.

These factors are unique to India among other large democracies and demand a different approach to policy education. To create a top-tier public policy school in India, we must design an institution suited to our political reality – where power is informal, personalised, and heavily dependent on executive control. Such an institution must serve dual purposes: first, equipping students with both traditional policy expertise and an understanding of India's unique power dynamics; and second, facilitating a more stable policy ecosystem.

Unlike western policy schools that focus on formal institutions and assume straightforward paths to influence, an Indian institution must teach students to navigate a complex web of informal networks, regional power structures, and social dynamics. The curriculum must go beyond traditional policy education to map how power actually works – through relationships, caste hierarchies, regional elites, and grassroots movements. Students need to learn not just policy theory but also how to be effective in a system where power is opaque and unevenly

distributed, where idealism must meet pragmatism and the ability to adapt to local conditions to create real change.

Most importantly, to truly train development leaders who want to do good for their country, the school must select for, and cultivate, empathy for the people of our country. Too often, empathy for the lived reality of people's lives is overlooked and leads to top-down diktats that can wreak havoc in people's lives.

The need for space

Finally, the current situation where political legitimacy and influence are tied too closely to the executive leads to sycophancy, opportunism and instability. A school focused on nation-building must thus facilitate a broad institutional space in which legitimacy and influence would be based on the depth and the quality of public interventions instead of proximity to power. At its deep end, this would require a series of structural reforms in our politics and governance, but a foundation could be built through diverse partnerships and the identification of nation-builders across the political spectrum and sectors. Such a network cutting across politics, bureaucracy, civil society, academia, think tanks, and media would provide depth as well as opportunities for influence and collaboration across all regimes.

By creating this non-partisan, yet politically aware, space, the institution could nurture development professionals who maintain relevance despite regime changes. This would create more stable channels for policy input, improving the quality of public debate and governance in India.

It is this dual role that would allow the school and its graduates to influence power instead of operating at lower levels. Such an institution would set an example for other developing nations and gain global prominence by demonstrating that effective policy education must arise from local realities rather than mirror western models

Why Has India Yet to Produce a World-Class Public Policy Institution?

❖ **Comparison with Global Institutions:**

- The U.S. has the John F. Kennedy School of Government (Harvard Kennedy School).
- Europe boasts the London School of Economics.
- These institutions shape national and global governance.
- India sends its best talent abroad for training despite having numerous policy schools.

❖ **Challenges in India's Political and Institutional Landscape:**

- India's political and institutional structure hampers the growth of world-class policy schools.
- Limited access points for academics, commentators, and civil society to influence policy-making.

❖ **Executive dominance in decisionmaking restricts the role of deliberative processes**





The Executive's Dominance in Policy-Making

- ❖ **Centralised Power:**
 - In India, power is heavily centralised within the executive and political elite.
 - Bureaucrats and party leaders hold significant decision-making authority.
 - Legislative oversight of the executive is weak, limiting deliberative policy-making.
- ❖ **Contrast with the U.S. Model:**
 - U.S. Congress can craft legislation independently, creating entry points for policy experts.
 - Decentralised decision-making encourages a vibrant ecosystem of think tanks and policy schools.
 - Funding and influence are sustained through meaningful lawmaking contributions.
- ❖ **Implications in India:**
 - The centralised nature of power reduces the influence of policy professionals unless aligned with top leadership.
 - Weak formalisation of the Indian state leads to a disconnect between politics and policy.
 - Policy discourse is often downstream and not integrated into the political platform.

Influence and Stability in Decision-Making

- ❖ **Power Dependence:**
 - Influence on decision-making in India is closely tied to the ruling government.
 - Regime changes result in the realignment of public spheres, sidelining previous influencers.
- ❖ **Fragility of Public Life:**
 - Policy ecosystems in India lack stability due to frequent shifts in power.
 - More institutionalised democracies maintain consistent influence of think tanks and advocacy groups across regimes.
- ❖ **Need for Adaptation:**
 - India's unique political landscape demands a different approach to public policy education.
 - Institutions must account for informal, personalised, and executive-driven power structures.

Path Forward

- ❖ **Designing a World-Class Institution for India:**
 - Create an institution tailored to India's political realities.
 - Equip professionals to navigate informal and centralised power systems.
- ❖ **Dual Purposes:**
 - Develop leaders capable of influencing India's unique policy environment.
 - Integrate policy expertise with the needs of the executive and political elite.





A JUMBO CRISIS IN MADHYA PRADESH



A six-month-old elephant calf, part of the herd of 13 that lost 10 members in October, being treated at the Rama Elephant Camp of the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh. A.M. WILKINSON

A jumbo crisis in Madhya Pradesh

Ten elephants died at the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve between October 29 and 31. Lab reports found that they had eaten large quantities of fungus-infected Kodo millet, which had caused acute toxicity. **Mehul Malpani** reports on the tragic incident in a State that is struggling to deal with its increasing jumbo population

It was business as usual at the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) in Madhya Pradesh on the morning of October 29. All the officers were headed to the BTR headquarters at Umaria for a review meeting. Some had already gone home for Diwali, while some were to leave in the next two days.

Arpit Mairal, the forest range officer of Pataar range, was running late for the meeting. On his way, at around 11 a.m., he got a call from the beat guard of Salkhaniya village, who told him that a herd of 13 wild elephants was behaving strangely. The guards and the beat officer had spotted the elephants some 200 metres away. They told me that four of them were lying on the ground and not moving, while some were sitting or standing in unusual positions," says Mairal. Elephants do not usually lie down or sit for long as they find it difficult to get back on their feet.

Mairal immediately drove for an hour and a half to the spot on the border of the Pataar and Khitauli core ranges near Salkhaniya. He and some guards found 10 elephants lying on the forest floor in a radius of 100-150 m.

Mairal called the Bandhavgarh Deputy Director, Prakash Kumar Verma. He asked Verma to cancel the meeting and rush to the spot with all the rangers and sub-divisional officers (SDOs).

Four elephants were dead. Six were barely moving—they were flapping their ears or moving their tails slowly," he recalls, as he prepares a detailed report sought by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Mairal says Verma despatched all the officials to the spot and stayed back at the headquarters to call veterinarians from other national parks and from Umaria. BTR's lone wildlife vet, Dr. Nitin Gupta, who was on his way to Jabalpur for personal reasons, rushed back to the reserve.

By 5 p.m., there were 150-200 guards, rangers, senior officials, and private and government vets, apart from a few heavy machines, tractors, and medical equipment at the spot. When it became dark, the two halogen lights installed for treatment proved insufficient. The officials positioned 10-12 cars in a half circle and used the vehicle lights. They also made small trenches and lit a fire to keep away other wild elephants.

For the next 36 hours, the spot turned into a makeshift hospital. However, despite their best efforts, four elephants died on October 30 and the remaining two passed away the next day. A post-mortem was conducted at the same spot and the pachyderms were buried nearby. During the burial, other elephants turned up, stood at a distance, trumpeted, and flapped their ears.

A crop that can kill

The death of the 10 elephants—nine female and one male—brought the BTR into the national limelight. Multiple teams of Central and State agencies visited the reserve for investigation. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav sent a three-member high-level team to Bandhavgarh. The State government suspended the Chief Conservator of Forests and Field Director as well as an SDO for negligence. Earlier this week, the Central government sent the Director General of Forests and Special Secretary in the Environment Ministry to Bhopal to report on the incident and the measures taken on elephant management.

The post-mortem report stated that the ele-

phants died after eating Kodo millet. Forensic examinations confirmed this. A toxicology report from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research's Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Bareilly, said that a high concentration of cyclospazonic acid was detected in multiple organs of each elephant and that the animals might have consumed a large quantity of Kodo plant/grains. A report from the School of Wildlife Forensic and Health (SWFH), Jabalpur, found acute toxicity in the vital organs of the animals. The BTR management also sent samples of Kodo crop and seeds to the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics, Hyderabad, which found extremely high contents of cyclospazonic acid in the crop samples, a source says.

Meanwhile, test results from the State Forensic Science Laboratory, Sagor, ruled out poisoning from pesticide, insecticide, or any other chemical. Allegations that the herbos were killed by poachers were also found to be baseless.

On November 12, the National Green Tribunal issued notices to the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare; the Wildlife Institute of India; IVRI, Bareilly; the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden, Madhya Pradesh; and the Umaria Collector into the deaths of the animals and the connection with Kodo.

Days after the 10 elephants died, a wild elephant killed two men and critically injured one. This led to concerns about a serious human-animal conflict in the region. Officials at BTR suspect, based on the description of the elephant and the location of the two deaths, that a male elephant, aged 10-12 years, captured after the killings, is from the same herd of 13. While another fully grown adult male remains untraced, a six-month-old calf of the herd was rescued in a distressed condition about a week later in Katni, about 80 km from the spot where the rest died. It is now at BTR's Rama Elephant Camp.

A perfect storm

Known as a "wild cereal", Kodo has been grown in India for centuries, but was largely limited to forests and tribal regions. As it is high in protein and fibre, Kodo has now become popular among people with lifestyle diseases. Kodo, once sold

for about 340-50 per kilogramme in local farmers' markets in Madhya Pradesh, is now priced at 150-220 per kg.

Bandhavgarh Deputy Director Verma says Kodo used to be grown on small patches of land. Now, farmers have started cultivating it on a large scale for commercial purposes.

The farm where the elephants ate Kodo belonged to Manoj Kumar from Salkhaniya. Verma says Kumar and two or three other farmers had grown Kodo in about 10 acres of land that was on the boundary of the core zone and the village.

Dr. A.B. Shrivastava, founder-director of SWFH, Jabalpur, who has been roped in to help at BTR, says symptoms of Kodo toxicity can be easily detected and treatment given for both animals and people. But in BTR, symptoms could not be detected and help provided in time because the animals were in the wild. They had eaten nearly 8 acres of Kodo, say officials.

Dr. Shrivastava highlights the need for a study on the health impacts of Kodo so that there is a designed treatment in place. "Right now, we only give treatment to animals based on the symptoms they display. Treatment includes fluid therapy with IV drips and other fluids to dilute Kodo, as well as multivitamins," he says.

There is also limited research available on Kodo and more specifically, its relation with elephants. A 1983 research paper says, "Farmers believe that Kodo millet is poisonous after rain. It is known to produce unconsciousness or delirium with violent tremors of the voluntary muscles. There are reports that elephants have died from eating Kodo millet..."

A 2023 research paper titled 'Potential Risk of Cyclospazonic Acid Toxicity in Kodia Poisoning', says, "Although millet is cultivated in dry and semi-arid regions, sometimes environmental conditions like spring and summer strikes as being suitable for a certain kind of poisoning which leads to greater economic crop loss." It adds that such conditions make millets more susceptible to fungal infections, especially from ergot fungi. The infection produces cyclospazonic acid.

Dr. Shrivastava explains that such climatic conditions are rare, but are mostly seen in October when the sun is bright, the crop is ready for harvesting, and the region receives heavy rainfall. In the BTR case, high contents of fungus were also found in the harvested crop that was kept in bundles in the farm where the elephants ate.

A struggle in the wild

The eastern forests of Madhya Pradesh have always had elephants as visitors. In November 2018, a batch of 41 elephants arrived at BTR from Chhatisgarh and stayed. Within a year, they bred two calves. Since then, three forests in Madhya Pradesh—BTR, the Sanjay Dubri National Park in Sidhi, and the Kanha National Park in Mandla—have received multiple batches of elephants, mainly from Chhatisgarh and Odisha. The estimated jumbo population is 150. Bandhavgarh alone is home to 65-70 elephants, Mairal says.

But the State does not have the resources to deal with this increasing population. Forest guards, tasked with tracking the movements of animals such as tigers and elephants, are not pro-



I think the 13 elephants were part of a larger herd of 32. When the others returned and saw the scenes during the post-mortem, they began to roar loudly.

PUSHPENDRA DWIVEDI

Former honorary wildlife warden of Umaria

vided with tranquilisers or vehicles to protect themselves in case of an attack. Gyaan Singh, a forest guard, survived an attack by a tiger in 2014. "The animal left me alive simply because it wanted to. I had no way of saving myself," he says.

Chhullu Singh, a fellow guard posted closest to the spot where the 10 elephants died, carries an axe and rides a bicycle. He says the dog and the windows of their quarters were broken by an elephant three years ago. "I wrote to senior officials many times but nothing has happened," he says.

Verma says the department started building elephant-proof trenches around these quarters last year but is yet to cover all of them.

The tragedies show various other lapses on the part of the BTR management and at the policy level. "We don't have a training team to work with wild elephants, especially elephants, when we rescue them," says Verma. "We don't know how to rehabilitate them. We need special enclosures to keep elephants which come away from their herd. We also need them to treat elephants that get hurt." These facilities are available in Chhatisgarh. Talks are on with the Madhya Pradesh government to work on these aspects, he says.

The State government is also sending officials to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, which have large elephant populations. They are expected to gain exposure on best practices on elephant management. The first batch is leaving on Sunday.

The government plans to use satellite collars on one or two members of a herd to track movements. Verma says a proposal to use thermal imaging to locate the animals easily is also being discussed. Another official at BTR says this can also be used to alert villagers about the movements of elephants. If these measures work, the forest department can use trap cameras to identify individual elephants, Verma contends.

Officials also admit that one or two of the elephants could have been saved if another doctor had been available. Dr. Gupta, the only vet at Bandhavgarh, recalls the events of October 29-31 as being "extremely stressful".

"I was running around giving instructions to all the other vets we had brought. Local vets mostly deal with domestic animals and don't have expertise in dealing with wild animals," he says. "It is difficult to give an injection or a drip to an elephant as it keeps moving and could hurt people. In such cases, we have to sometimes give liquid medicines through the animal's rectum."

Dr. Gupta says there is no permanent facility at BTR to treat animals and that he always travels to the spot to do his job. The new Field Director, Anupam Sahay, says the forest department is considering providing an assistant to Dr. Gupta, who has been with BTR for about 15 years.

Madhya Pradesh Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest Wildlife, Keshvrammourthy, says there is no separate budget for elephants in the State. Two years ago, Project Elephant was merged with Project Tiger in Madhya Pradesh. "As part of this, we get funding from both the Central and State governments," he says.

'They were family'

Meanwhile, locals are concerned that the human-animal conflict could become worse. Nine White-Backed groups, one of each range of BTR, have suddenly become active. The groups have village heads, members of Bahli Mitra Dai (a designated group in each village to create awareness about elephants), local beat officers, rangers, and the Deputy Director as members. They receive messages every hour from people asking about elephant movements, and provide updates.

There is a tense silence in Salkhaniya village, about 1.5 km from the farm where the elephants ate Kodo. Manoj Kumar's house is locked.

A farmer, Rajpal Singh Dora, is one of the few who is willing to talk. "After the elephant deaths, the forest officials ploughed many fields where Kodo had been grown. Farmers were not even allowed to harvest and store the yield," he says. "Nobody here will talk against the forest department as we have to rely on them for compensation in case of crop damage by animals."

Sahay says Kodo had been cultivated in about 1,500 acres of land within the boundaries of BTR and more than half had been harvested. For the unharvested crop, farmers were given the option of handing over their yield to the forest department and getting compensated. Some agreed.

"Kodo in itself is not harmful, but at the moment we don't have a way of identifying the fungus-infected crop. So, we considered all Kodo as harmful in the current circumstances," he says.

Elsewhere, there is sorrow. Pushpendra Dwivedi, former honorary wildlife warden of Umaria, recalls the distress of other elephants during the post-mortem. "I think the 13 elephants were part of a larger herd of 32. They must have split up in search of food. When the others returned and saw the scenes during the post-mortem, they began to roar loudly. We had to use sirens and other noises to keep them away and continue the examination," he says.

After the incident, patrolling teams have spotted smaller groups of elephants wandering in the forest. "We suspect that they are searching for their herd members. They generally end their search once they find evidence that their herd members are no more," Mairal says.

Most officials say the three days were "traumatic and sad". Sriji Kabore Barman, a beat guard with Khitauli range, doubts if anyone celebrated Diwali. "You don't celebrate festivals when someone in your family dies," he says. "Here, we lost 10 of them."



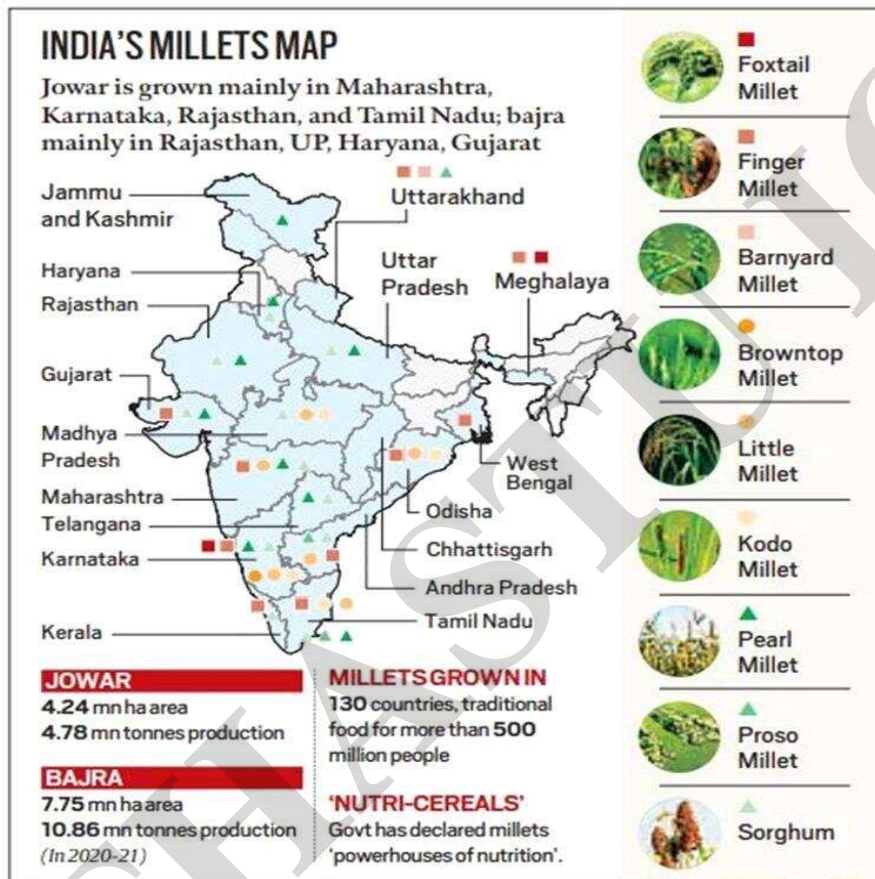
An elephant being treated by veterinarians. It died along with nine others. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

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Background of the Incident

- ❖ **Timeframe:** Between October 29 and 31.
- ❖ **Location:** Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR), Madhya Pradesh.
- ❖ **Casualties:** Ten elephants died due to acute toxicity caused by consuming fungus-infected Kodo millet.



Kodo millet (*Paspalum scrobiculatum*)

- ↳ "Kodra", Varagu
- ↳ hardiest crop, drought tolerant. high yield potential,
- ↳ excellent storage properties, rich in vitamin, minerals
- ↳ staple food: tribal communities.
- ↳ climatic conditions: Tropical & Subtropical regions. grow on poor soils (orig. MP. (as per research) [Crj, Kar, Ch, TN])
- ↳ Cyclopiaxonic Acid mycotoxin associated with Kodo seeds
- ↳ [Matwana Kodo or Matona Kodo] → "poisoned Kodo" → affects nervous & cardiovascular system.



Key Issues Highlighted

❖ **Toxicity from Contaminated Food:**

- Lab reports confirmed that the elephants consumed Kodo millet infected with fungus, leading to fatal poisoning.

❖ **Resource and Infrastructure Gaps:**

- Insufficient lighting hindered nighttime rescue efforts, with vehicle lights and trenches used as makeshift solutions.
- A lack of sufficient veterinary personnel and immediate medical facilities delayed critical treatment.

❖ **Inadequate Monitoring:**

- The reserve lacked early detection mechanisms to identify contaminated food sources or monitor herd health.

Larger Context: Challenges in Managing the Jumbo Population

- ❖ **Rising Elephant Numbers:** Madhya Pradesh is witnessing an increasing elephant population, leading to challenges in habitat management.

- ❖ **Human-Wildlife Conflict:** Overlap between human settlements and wildlife habitats increases the risk of exposure to contaminated food sources.

- ❖ **Insufficient Policy Framework:** Limited preventive measures in place to address food safety and disease surveillance for wildlife.

Bandhavgarh TR.

↳ Umaria district. → 1968 NP → 1993 TR.
 → Bandhavgarh fort → known for "Royal Bengal Tiger".
 → Other NP in MP. → Kanha, Panna NP, Dinosaur fossil NP, Pach NP, Ghyghua fossil NP, Sarjay NP, Kund Madhar, Satpura, Van Vihar.
 notified by state govt under WPA 1972.

Elephants

↳ 4 main species

- Indian (Asia) → EN, CITES App I (WPA - Sch I)
- Sumatran (Asia) → CR
- Savanna (Bush forest) → EN
- Africa → CR

• Largest land mammal on Asian continent
 National Heritage Animal of India.

• Top 5 Indian states by Max. eleph. pop. Kar > Assam > Ker > TN > Odi

• Social Structure

- females are more social than males; form herd (5-7)
- Led by oldest female the "matriarch"
- males usually live alone.

• Threats → Habitat fragmentation, poaching for ivory, H-A conflict, Mistreatment in Captivity.





Graj Soochna app (2022) → MIKE (Monitoring Illegal killing of Elephants
Prog) 2009.

Graj Yatra

Hathi mera Saathi campaign (2011)

National Elephant Corridor → Proj Elephant 1992.

Recommendations for Prevention and Response

❖ Improved Monitoring Systems:

- Establish routine checks for food safety within wildlife reserves.
- Deploy technology like drones for real-time tracking of wildlife health and movement.

❖ Strengthening Veterinary Support:

- Increase the number of wildlife veterinarians and provide specialized training in toxicology and emergency care.

❖ Enhanced Infrastructure:

- Invest in better lighting and medical equipment for remote and emergency situations.

❖ Community Involvement:

- Educate local communities about the risks of feeding wildlife contaminated food.
- Encourage reporting of unusual wildlife behavior.

❖ Policy Reforms:

- Develop a state-level action plan for wildlife health management, emphasizing preventive care and rapid response.

— *Keep Learning and Keep Revising!* —

