

Editorial of the Day – 10.11.2025

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1. Greater openness – On India and wildlife management

General Studies 3 – Environment

Topic – Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Introduction

A recent inquiry into the Vantara project—a large-scale private zoo in Jamnagar run by the Reliance Foundation—has brought India's wildlife governance under global scrutiny. Although a Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) cleared the project of any wrongdoing in the import of wild animals, subsequent observations by the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) committee have revived significant questions. These concerns focus on the transparency of India's wildlife permit system and its compliance with global norms for endangered species trade and conservation.

1. The Vantara Project and Supreme Court Inquiry

SIT Submission (September 2025) – A Supreme Court-appointed SIT submitted its report on the Vantara project.

SIT Findings (Pro-Vantara) – The SIT concluded that the project was fully compliant with all Indian laws governing wildlife import and care. It confirmed that Vantara held valid permits and maintained high-quality facilities for its 30,000+ animals. The report termed any criticism of Vantara's operations as "unjustified."

Lack of Full Disclosure – The Supreme Court did not make the full SIT report public. It only attached a brief summary of the findings with its official order.

2. CITES Committee Intervention and Global Scrutiny

CITES Visit – Following the SIT's submission, the CITES committee conducted its own visit to Jamnagar to investigate the project's permits, animal acquisition methods, and zoo infrastructure.

CITES Report Findings

Positive – The committee publicly praised Vantara's high-quality infrastructure and standards of animal care.

Negative – However, the report raised significant doubts about the permit documentation associated with the animal acquisitions.

Key Distinction – The CITES committee's concern was not directed at Vantara's management. Instead, it was focused on the perceived flaws and lack of transparency within India's national wildlife permitting system itself.

3. Concerns Over Permit Documentation

Record Discrepancies – The CITES report highlighted mismatches between Indian records and the records of the countries that exported the animals.

Specific Example (The Czech Republic) – The Czech Republic's records claimed it had "sold" animals to Indian entities associated with the Vantara project. Vantara authorities denied any "sale," stating that the payments made were limited to covering insurance and transport costs, not the commercial value of the animals.

Legal Crux – This distinction is critical because Indian law explicitly prohibits the commercial procurement (purchase) of wild animals by zoos. Therefore, unclear or contradictory documentation makes it difficult to verify compliance with India's own wildlife trade laws.

4. Legal, Institutional, and Transparency Implications

Differing Standards -

Indian Law - Prohibits commercial purchase of animals for zoos.

CITES Expectation - Allows commercial trade *if* it is transparently recorded, documented, and verifiable across borders.

Systemic Weaknesses - The incident exposed key weaknesses in India's governance -

Traceability - The system for tracing animals is often weak due to inconsistent records.

International Coordination - There is limited inter-governmental dialogue between India and counterpart nations to resolve such discrepancies.

Global Trust Deficit - The combination of the SIT's undisclosed (confidential) report and CITES's open-ended reservations has created a significant trust gap. This partial disclosure and opacity reduce international confidence in India's biodiversity protection credentials. As a megadiverse country, India cannot afford reputational damage to its wildlife management system.

5. Way Forward

To restore and strengthen global confidence, the following steps are necessary -

Full Disclosure - The full SIT report should be made public to enhance transparency and public trust.

Verify Traceability - Indian authorities must initiate inter-agency coordination with foreign wildlife bodies to verify the traceability and legal status of all imported animals.

Transparent Permit System - India must develop and enforce a transparent permit system that ensures all animal imports are non-commercial, lawful, and meticulously documented.

Institutional Strengthening - India's wildlife governance framework must be strengthened to effectively balance developmental interests with the nation's commitments to global conservation norms.

Conclusion

While the Vantara project's operations appear to be legally sound and professionally managed, the observations from the CITES committee underline deeper, systemic lapses in India's national wildlife governance. The current issues of partial disclosure and procedural opacity are eroding global trust in India's conservation regime. As a megadiverse nation, it is imperative for India to pursue transparent permit mechanisms, robust inter-agency coordination, and international accountability to safeguard both its biodiversity and its moral authority in global wildlife protection.

Source - <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/greater-openness-on-india-and-wildlife-management/article70259438.ece>

2. When prostate cancer is aggressive - How 65-year-old recovers with combination drug therapy that reduces mortality risk by 40%

General Studies 3 - Governance

Topic - Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Introduction

A recent global clinical trial has marked a significant advancement in cancer therapeutics, showing that a combination therapy of leuprolide and enzalutamide dramatically reduces mortality. This breakthrough specifically targets men with high-risk, recurring prostate cancer, offering new hope where standard treatments often fail and reinforcing the shift toward personalized medicine.

1. Background and Significance

Global Burden - Prostate cancer is the third most common cancer in men worldwide and a major cause of cancer-related deaths. It is particularly dangerous as it often progresses silently and becomes aggressive when diagnosed late.

Rising Trend in India - India has witnessed a growing trend in prostate cancer cases, particularly in urban centers. This rise is attributed to -

1. Lifestyle changes.
2. Improved detection and screening.

3. Ageing demographics.

Clinical Need – The new therapy is crucial for patients with recurrent (returning) or advanced disease, a stage where conventional treatments often lose their effectiveness.

2. Key Findings of the (EMBARC) Study

Trial Protocol – The findings emerged from the EMBARK protocol, a Phase-3 global clinical trial.

Therapy Tested – The trial tested a combination of leuprolide (a standard hormonal therapy) with enzalutamide (an androgen receptor blocker).

Primary Result – The combination therapy reduced the overall risk of death by 40.3% when compared to using single-drug (monotherapy) treatment.

Other Outcomes – This approach successfully delays disease progression, lowers relapse rates, and significantly improves survival outcomes in high-risk cases.

Availability in India – The therapy is already approved and available in India, making it accessible to patients through major oncological centers like the Tata Memorial Centre in Mumbai.

3. How the Combination Therapy Works

The combination attacks the cancer from two distinct hormonal fronts –

Leuprolide – This drug suppresses the body's production of testosterone, the primary male hormone that acts as fuel for prostate cancer cell growth.

Enzalutamide – This drug functions as an androgen receptor blocker. It prevents cancer cells from using any residual hormones that may still be circulating for proliferation (multiplication).

Combined Effect – This dual attack effectively "starves" the cancer cells. It is highly effective in preventing recurrence after initial treatments like surgery or radiation. It reduces biochemical relapse, which is the rise in PSA (Prostate-Specific Antigen) levels that indicates the cancer is returning.

4. Implications for India

Advocacy for Early Detection – The breakthrough reinforces the critical need for physicians to advocate for regular PSA testing and urological evaluations, especially for men over 50 or those at high risk. Early identification dramatically improves outcomes.

Infrastructure Readiness – India's expanding network of cancer care institutions and oncological centers is capable of integrating this advanced therapy into their standard treatment protocols.

Public Health Impact – Wider adoption can significantly reduce cancer-related mortality and enhance life expectancy in men. It promotes the use of evidence-based treatment protocols within Indian oncology practices.

Major Challenge (Cost & Accessibility) – These advanced combination therapies remain very costly. Ensuring widespread use will depend heavily on insurance coverage and government support mechanisms.

5. Broader Scientific and Policy Relevance

Scientific Importance – This success represents a major shift towards precision oncology, which involves tailoring treatment based on the specific molecular and hormonal profiles of a patient's cancer.

Policy Perspective – This advancement aligns perfectly with the goals of India's National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS). It encourages the crucial integration of advanced clinical research with frontline healthcare delivery.

Ethical Consideration – The rollout of such new treatments reinforces the need for clinical trial transparency, robust patient safety monitoring, and ensuring equitable access to medical innovations.

6. Way Forward

To leverage this and future breakthroughs, India must focus on –

Strengthening Cancer Registries – To improve national surveillance, data collection, and early diagnosis mechanisms.

Enhancing Medical Research – To promote and increase Indian participation in global multicentric clinical trials.

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Public Awareness – To launch widespread education campaigns focused on men's health, prostate cancer symptoms, and the importance of early screening.

Affordable Access – To actively explore policy options like government schemes and incentivizing generic production to make these life-saving therapies more affordable.

Conclusion

The success of the leuprolide–enzalutamide combination is a milestone in the management of aggressive prostate cancer. It exemplifies how scientific innovation, early diagnosis, and evidence-based treatment can converge to save lives. For India, the primary challenge is to successfully integrate such advanced therapies into the public health system while simultaneously addressing the critical issues of affordability and accessibility to ensure benefits reach all sections of society.

Source - <https://indianexpress.com/article/health-wellness/drug-combo-reduces-death-risk-for-aggressive-prostate-cancer-10356041/>

