The death of Kalpana, a white tigress in Delhi zoo, on Wednesday had set alarm bells ringing. However, the Ministry for Environment, Forests and Climate Change clarified late on Friday evening that the tigress died of renal failure and other complications related to old age.

With nine big cats in New York’s Bronx zoo having tested positive for COVID-19, forestry and zoo authorities across India have been extra cautious about keeping the infection away from fauna.

Elsewhere in the world, domestic animals like cats and dogs, too, have tested positive for the virus. However, there is still not enough information on whether the infection can spread back to humans through animals.

Precautionary Measures to protect tigers in Zoo:

- A letter from the NTCA to all tiger ranging States that owing to the communicable and zoonotic nature of the coronavirus, certain actions need to be taken to avert the disease in wild tigers in India.
- Tigers may be observed for symptoms cosset with COVID-19 such as respiratory signs of nasal discharge, coughing and laboured breathing through direct observation to the extent possible besides through camera trap images for visible symptoms,” the NTCA letter to tiger ranging States.
- Earlier in the day, the CZA wrote to all zoos in the country to take precautionary measures in the wake of confirmation of the presence of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that leads to the COVID-19 disease, in a tiger housed in the Bronx Zoo.
- Zoos in the country are, therefore, advised to remain on the highest alertness, watch animals on 24x7 basis, including CCTV for any abnormal behaviour/symptoms, keepers handlers not to be allowed in the vicinity, without safety gear preferably PPE (personal protective equipment), isolate and quarantine sick animals and have least contact while providing feed to animals.

Central Zoo Authority

- Central Zoo Authority is an autonomous statutory body
- It regulates the functioning of zoos
- It has been constituted under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972
- Organisation: The Authority consists of a Chairman, ten members and a Member Secretary
- Main objective: To complement the national effort in conservation of wild life

Recognition of Zoo Rules, 1992:

- Standards and norms for housing, upkeep, health care and overall management of animals in zoos
- Every zoo in the country is required to obtain recognition from the Authority for its operation
- The Authority evaluates the zoos with reference to the parameters prescribed under the Rules and grants recognition accordingly
- Zoos which have no potential to come up to the prescribed standards and norms may be refused recognition and asked to close down

Roles & Functions:

- The Authority’s role is more of a facilitator than a regulator
- It, therefore, provides technical and financial assistance to such zoos which have the potential to attain the desired standard in animal management
- Primary function– grant of recognition and release of financial assistance
- It also regulates the exchange of animals of endangered category Listed under Schedule-I and II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act among zoos
- Exchange of animals between Indian and foreign zoos is also approved by the Authority before the requisite clearances under EXIM Policy and the CITES permits are issued by the competent authority
The Authority also coordinates and implements programmes on capacity building of zoo personnel, planned breeding programmes and ex-situ research including biotechnological intervention for conservation of species for complementing in-situ conservation efforts in the country.

**Some major initiatives:**

- Establishment of Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species at Hyderabad for carrying out research in biotechnology, planned breeding of Red Panda and its restocking into the wild
- Upgradation of diagnostic facilities for disease diagnosis at selected veterinary institutions and their networking with zoos on regional basis for better health care of animals.

**National Board for Wild Life**

- National Board for Wild Life is a “Statutory Organization” constituted under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Theoretically, the **board is “advisory” in nature** and advises the Central Government on framing policies and measures for conservation of wildlife in the country. However, it is a very important body because it serves as apex body to review all wildlife-related matters and approve projects in and around national parks and sanctuaries.
- Primary function of the Board is to promote the conservation and development of wildlife and forests. It has power to review all wildlife-related matters and approve projects in and around national parks and sanctuaries. No alternation of boundaries in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries can be done without approval of the NBWL.
- **The NBWL is chaired by the Prime Minister** It has 47 members including the Prime Minister. Among these, 19 members are ex-officio members. Other members include three Members of Parliament (two from Lok Sabha and one from Rajya Sabha), five NGOs and 10 eminent ecologists, conservationists and environmentalists.