

Tiger's meat tickles the north-east palate

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct 19

LEOPARDS AND TIGERS are being killed not just for their glossy skins and the medicinal elixirs that can be concocted from their bones and claws but, believe it or not, even for their meat. Though rare, leopard and even tiger meat is consumed in Nagaland and some of the North-Eastern States.

Earlier this month as the country was observing Wildlife Week reports of a feasting on leopard meat trickled in.

The officials of Nagaland state piggery farm between Changtongya and Tuli on the Angur Mokakchung Road found that a leopard would often attack

at night and disappear with a nice fat pig, which was kept for slaughter. Despite the best efforts of those in charge of the piggery there was no stopping the leopard. So it was decided to catch the marauder.

A trap was set and the magnificent specimen was caught. An eye injury, it was found, had forced the leopard to hunt for smaller and easier prey. The caged animal was taken to Kohima and handed over to the Director for Animal Husbandry. It was kept in his home as a search was launched for an alternate home. But most zoos have a surplus of leopards and lions and since it costs almost Rs 25,000 to Rs 30,000 a year to feed a big cat, no one wanted the leopard.

Meanwhile, the official found

it difficult to keep the leopard at home. He had two little children and his wife was terrified of the big cat. So one fine day he decided to buy peace at home by carving up the protected animal and eating it up.

For Nagas eating any form of wildlife comes easily. It is part their of tradition. Efforts to inculcate conservation consciousness about wildlife in the North-East have not even been attempted because the dominant tribal population thinks it is their birthright to hunt for food.

Like the Chinese, the Nagas have gobbled up their wildlife. Infact they feast on anything that creeps and crawls. Visitors to Nagaland cannot help noticing the intense stillness – the absence

of twittering birds and animal sounds. The Friday market gives visitors a fair idea of the Nagas' concern for wildlife. Venison is sold openly and there are jars galore with 'crawlies' from which a delectable soup can be brewed.

Almost five years ago when Mrs Menaka Gandhi was the Minister for Environment, the forest minister of Mizoram ordered a forest ranger to take out a fat cheetal from the zoo and shoot it for a feast. Talk of the feast reached Delhi. Action against the Minister was proposed by the Ministry but nothing came of it.

Photographer Aditya Arya witnessed and documented the ceremonial tiger hunt of the Konyo tribe of Nagaland almost

eight years ago. Two tigers were killed in Cheu and Lungwa villages and a massive feast was organised. Arya has a photograph of the tribal chief proudly skinning a tiger.

In Simlipal Tiger Reserve in Orissa and Dalma sanctuary of Bihar too an 'akhand shikar' is conducted by the tribals. But the animals hunted are smaller – wild pigs and deer.

Infact while India and the Global Tiger Forum are making a hue and cry about China eating up all its tigers and encouraging poaching in India, we have not been able to stop the feasting on tigers in India. However, a tiger hunt is a rare event carried out surreptitiously.

Tigress, cubs poisoned near Dudhwa

Sterile zone plan to prevent killings not implemented

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Jan. 2

While the country was heralding with crackers the dawn of a New Year, a tigress and her two cubs were struggling against death as the poison, placed in the innards of the cow they had killed earlier, pervaded their system.

The ghastly killing of the tigress and her cubs occurred just two-and-a-half kilometres from Dudhwa National Park at Kulupurwa village. With the poisoning of the tigress and her cubs, the death toll by poisoning in the span of three weeks in the UP forests has shot up to five.

The Field Director of Dudhwa National Park, Mr Roopak Dey, has arrested the owner of the cow and two others. Though there is a good prey base for the tigers in Dudhwa — barasingha, sambar, spotted deer, barking deer and

wild boar — a tigress with cubs likes to go in for an easy kill for the growing cubs.

In Dudhwa, the sugarcane fields begin where the National Park ends and tigers have been known to litter in the tall cane fields.

A few years ago, several cases of man-eaters were reported round Dudhwa National Park and experts who investigated the killings had suggested a clear, vacant space between the National Park and farmers fields. However, this recommendation has not been implemented and now tigers are being poisoned in the same cane fields.

Earlier, it was the trigger happy poachers that were killing the tigers for their skins and other parts which fetched a fantastic price in the Chinese and South-East Asian markets. Now with villagers retaliating against the lifting of their cattle by actually poisoning the tigers to death, the

majestic king of the jungles is facing extinction.

Mr P. K. Sen, Director of Project Tiger, was confident that the Dudhwa killing is the work of the local villagers and not poachers. Some 20 cases of tiger poisoning have been reported from the Srisaigram Tiger Reserve in Andhra Pradesh in the last two years. While in Andhra, the Naxalites have been inciting villagers to kill the tigers which have been lifting cattle, in Dudhwa and Corbett National Park, tired of their daily battle for survival, the villagers have taken to poisoning the big cat on their own.

The carcasses of the dead animals, including the cow, have been sent to the Indian Veterinary Research Institute, Bareilly, and the viscera to the forensic laboratory at Lucknow. Ironically, despite the seriousness of the tiger poisoning cases, the forensic reports on the Corbett deaths have not yet been received.

Dr Pradeep Malik of the Wildlife Institute, Dehra Dun, had suspected that the tigers may have died of a feline virus. Confirmation of his findings have also not come in though some controlled burning of the area where the dead tigers were found has been done.

Despite all the hue and noise by foreign, NGOs as well as some local ones about the fate of the royal Bengal Tiger, there does not seem to be the same concern for the tiger in India. How else can one explain the delay in States submitting their findings on the tiger census completed in May/June this year.

According to the last census, done two or three years ago, there were 98 tigers in Dudhwa. However, tiger experts fear that the numbers are exaggerated. According to Mr Sen, there are not more than 3000 tigers in the jungles of India and they are being decimated at an alarming pace.

Foul play suspected in death of tigress

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, June 15

A tigress was found with a smashed skull on the Alwar-Jaipur road, inside Sariska tiger reserve on the night of June 4. Was it actually hit and killed by a truck, or was it hunted and killed elsewhere and then put on the highway?

Mr Naveen Raheja, a member of the Environment and Forest Ministry's Tiger Crisis Cell, who went to Sariska to investigate the death, suspects foul play. What has added to his suspicion is the manner in which the tigress is said to have been cremated. Even a dead tiger is never burnt, Mr Raheja has informed the Environment and Forest Minister.

The post-mortem of the tigress was done by local Government veterinary doctors. It showed a smashed, lower left jaw. There were two holes of about a centimetre each on the lower side of the left jaw. One of the veterinary doctors has said it died of shock and haemorrhage.

Field director Tejveer Singh had reported that the tigress was killed after a head-on collision with a

truck while it was chasing a spotted deer inside the park. A motorcyclist, driving behind the truck, reported the accident at Sariska.

However, Raheja points out that the tiger is a shy animal which camouflages itself when a vehicle approaches. It has a keen sense of hearing and is unlikely to go hurtling into a noisy truck followed by an equally noisy motorcycle. Such a head-on collision with a truck has never before been reported.

Moreover, a tiger is quite strong animal and weighs 150 to 200 kgs. If the tigress was killed by the impact of the accident, even the front portion of the truck should have been dented, argues Raheja.

Raheja also points out that for an animal that died of external injuries and haemorrhage, very little blood was found at the site of the so-called accident.

The CPI-M leader asked how all options by

Wolves avenging their pups' death!

By Usha Rai

RAI BARELI, March 31
Myths and superstition have made the wolf larger than its sharp canines and bloodshot eyes and added to the travails of the wildlife authorities hunting high and low for the killer wolves of UP.

A common story doing the rounds of village huts in Lelganj is that the wolves were retaliating after a pup picked up from the village forest of Kankapur died.

The truth is that a pup was picked up in January and had died two months later. But wolves, like other animals in the wild, are used to losing one or two of their offsprings. That is nature's law and there is no way that wolves will seek revenge, says Mr Kishore Rao, DIG, looking after wildlife in the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Mr Rao toured the wolf-affected area recently to evaluate the seriousness of the situation and assess the State Government programme to contain the wolf menace.

Ram Raj Singh (68), a thakur of Kankapur, told this correspondent that in January when he entered a rather isolated section of the forest, a dozen wolf pups came running towards him — probably thinking it was their mother bring-

ing food for them. The moment he picked up a pup and hugged it close to his chest, the others scampered off. He brought the pup home and fed it milk. In March, when it was almost two months old, the pup caught a chill and died, he said.

Mr Ashok Singh, UP's child wildlife warden, says a similar incident of a wolf pup being picked up and subsequently dying in the Jaunpur, Pratapgarh and Sultanpur sector last March — almost coincided with the child-lifting incidents. But like Mr Rao, Ashok Singh too dismisses the theory of 'avenge'.

Wolves form close-knit families. Mr Singh recalls that the wolf pup, picked up last June in the hunt for the killers, howled one night and there was an answering howl in unison from three to four wolves of Jaunpur.

But if in fact Raj Singh did see a dozen pups, a new record of a wolf litter can be entered. Normally a litter does not have more than 4 to 9 whelps, says Mr Rao. If the wolf population has increased, there is probably not enough natural prey in the area — especially in the period from January to April when there is a greater demand for food for the weaning wolves.

There is also a superstition that any human who sheds the blood of

a wolf will remain heirless. So deep-rooted is this fear that the local population, even if they have guns, will not join the Forest Department's hunt for the killer wolves. In fact, they refuse to believe that the killers are the same wolves that they have seen in the region.

According to Ashok Singh, there are 100 to 150 wolves in the Jaunpur, Pratapgarh, Sultanpur and Sitapur belt. The ravines along the rivers Sai, Peei and Bakulahi (tributaries of the Gomti) make it an ideal habitat for wolves. In Rai Bareli, the new area of wolf operation, too the Lone river and the innumerable dens for burrowing animals make it extremely difficult to track down the wolves.

The burgeoning human and cattle population has led to intense pressure on the wolf habitat, said Ashok Singh. Though the normal prey of the wolves seems to have disappeared from the area, there are peacocks, pigs, porcupine, rabbits and rodents that they can feast on, he added.

According to the Wildlife Institute study of the area, most families earn Rs 300 to Rs 500 a month and the large, uncontrolled child population of the area has made them easy prey.

Though the UP Government has increased the ex-gratia pay-

ment to Rs 25,000 if a child is killed (Rs 50,000 in the case of an adult; Rs 5,000 for an injury and Rs 10,000 for those disabled), children will have to be kept indoors.

Mr Ashok Singh would like a sanctuary to be declared in the area. This will reduce the man-animal conflict and lead to co-existence, he maintained.

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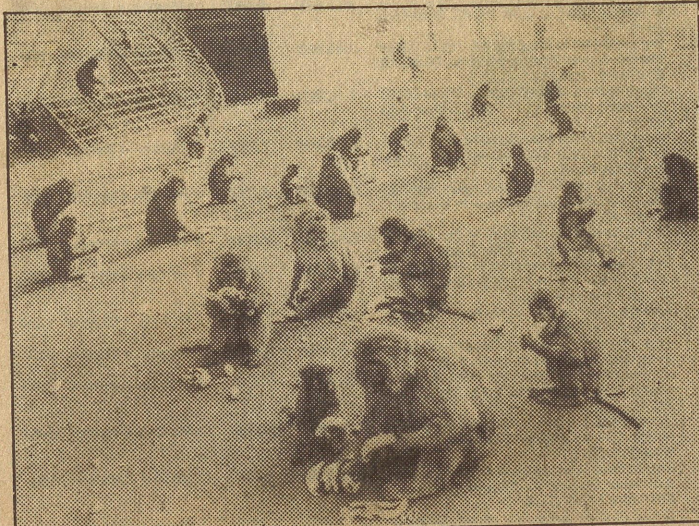
Brindavan monkeys translocated at new site

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Jan. 26
The new year means a new abode — cleaner, greener — for 605 rhesus monkeys of Brindawan who have been trapped and moved to half a dozen sites, 30 to 60 kms outside the pilgrim city.

Residents of Brindawan who have fed, pampered and even worshipped the *Hanuman sena* till it grew out of their control heaved a sigh of relief as the world's biggest monkey translocation project was completed successfully on Jan. 20. Almost half the monkey population of Brindawan has been moved out. No monkey was injured and family units were moved en bloc so that they continue to live as homogeneous groups in Chameli van and the Terai forests.

Even as the translocation operation was at its zenith a handful of people protested against the removal of the monkey *sena* from the city of Lord Krishna.



They blocked operations and even tried to free the trapped animals till they were convinced that the operation was in the best interest of the simians.

While the WWF-India funded

the project, it was executed by *Vatavaran*, an NGO headed by primatologist Dr Iqbal Malik. Baseline studies on the simians of Brindawan and people's attitude towards them were done by Ekbal

Imam of Aligarh University. Rajat Bhargava looked after the trapping operations and in all a dozen people were involved in trapping, translocation and resettling the animals in their new green surroundings.

The temple town situated on just 4.4 sq kms has a resident human population of 50,000 and an equally large floating population. The thick verdant forests that encompassed the city before Independence have disappeared and the only green spaces are the temple gardens which are more brown than green. With the forests disappearing 98 per cent of the simians began to depend on the locals and pilgrims for food.

They began to barge into home, grabbing whatever they could lay hands on. They would snatch bags from pilgrims in the hope that they contained food. Goggles and spectacles were deftly picked off noses and returned only when the money's blackmail paid off and he was rewarded with *channa* or other

goodies. Nineteen per cent of the residents had been bitten by the monkeys and 96 per cent said they were harassed.

While Hanuman's *vanar sena* stalked the streets and roof tops of Brindawan, people constructed steel barricades and fences to keep the monkeys out of their homes. That is when the WWF and *Vatavaran* decided to rescue the people of Brindawan as well as the simians who were looking sick and malnourished eating leftovers and crumbs.

While 13 holding cages were transported from Meerut, trapping cages were brought from Mathura. The cages were designed and made locally. A tractor and van was provided for the transportation of them members and monkeys to the new sites.

The first trapping was at Anand Maye Ashram. It was followed by trappings at temples, ashrams, road and local WWF office. Most of the sites were selected on the basis of requests by the heads of these *ashrams* and offices.

Mahajans struggle to save black buck

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Aug. 19

Like the women of Chamoli who launched the Chipko Movement by hugging trees to prevent them from being cut and the Bishnois of Rajasthan who made it their life's mission to protect the chinkara and black buck, the Botad Mahajans have contributed in a big way to the preservation of the black buck in the arid region of Saurashtra.

They have nurtured and protected a herd of 300 — now probably down to 200 — in the grasslands of Dhankaniya Vidi of Botad taluka of Saurashtra. Dr M. K. Ranjitsinh, director of the WWF Tiger Conservation Programme who has done his Ph.D on the ecology of the black buck, says they are infact leasing Government land and protecting the antelopes. Since there is inadequate grass for them to graze on, they have been purchasing green fodder and feeding them. This also prevents the black buck from damaging agricultural crops in the adjoining fields.

In fact the herd, protected and nurtured by the Botad Mahajans, is the second largest population of black buck after the one in the adjoining Velavadar National Park.

The herd that the Mahajans have strived to protect all these years now faces a new threat. The forest department has begun planting prosopis in the Vidi making the habitat unsuitable for the black buck. In the process they have reduced the grazing area and

poachers and pi-dogs, taking cover behind the new plantations, have been terrorising these gentle antelopes.

Dr Ranjitsinh, who has a whole chapter on religious sentiments and wildlife in his latest book "Beyond the tiger — portrait of Asian wildlife", has written to the forest secretary of Gujarat, Mr P. C. A. Rangadurai, to stop the prosopis from being planted in the area and to remove the dogs.

In the brief period Dr Ranjitsinh spent in Dhankaniya Vidi recently, he was shocked by the harassment of black bucks by the pi-dogs. "They were constantly chasing the deer who could not see them because of the prosopis plantation. Black bucks need open grasslands and if prosopis is being removed from Velavadar National Park, there is no reason to plant them in the area which supports the second largest population of black buck in the State," says Dr Ranjitsinh.

The Shree Botad Mahajan Panjrapol and Gaushala has also written to the Government

seeking a 100-year lease of the 3100 bighas of land where they are looking after 3000 old and abandoned cattle and the black buck.

The contribution of the Botad Mahajans to the conservation of the black bucks is so significant that they should receive the highest environment award of the land and recognition from the Gujarat Government, says Dr Ranjitsinh.

The Vala Rajputs and Wala Kathis of Saurashtra also hold the black bucks sacred and their areas always had large populations of the antelope — some surviving to this day. The business community of Botad are largely Jains and believe in vegetarianism and non-violence. They annually lease out a patch of rolling hills with scrub forest from the Government and patrol it with their own guards to protect the antelope. They pool their donations to purchase fodder and other needs of the cattle in their care. You can actually see the black buck taking the fodder from the carts, says Dr Ranjitsinh.

Is Pratapgarh's nightmare over with the killer wolves at bay?

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, July 6

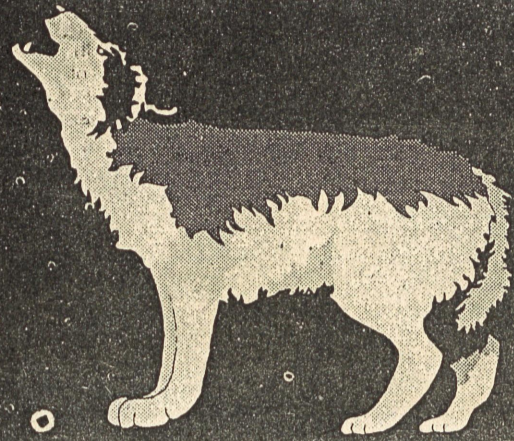
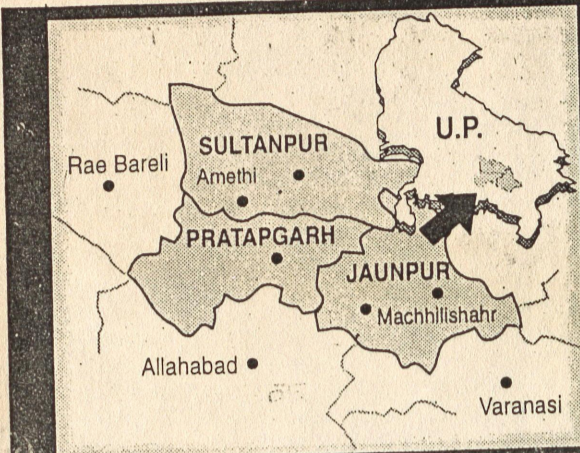
HAS the trauma of child lifting and killing by a pack of wolves operating in and around Pratapgarh, Jaunpur and Sultanpur districts of UP finally ended with the shooting of a female wolf and a near-adult at Kushpara village and the capture of a pup of five months in the last four days?

UP's Chief Wildlife Warden Ashok Singh, who personally took part in the hunt for the child lifters, is hoping the nightmare has ended. But he admits reluctantly that an adult male and another (about a year-old) of the family of five are still at large — which means the worst may not yet be over.

From March 17, when the killing of Ankith Kumar was reported from Daryaganj village in Jaunpur district to July 5, when the female wolf was shot dead, 21 children have been killed and 16 injured. The wolves claimed their last victim, a four-year-old girl of Shankarpur village, Pratapgarh, just a couple of hours before the female was shot.

Of the 21 children killed— five were from Jaunpur, 13 from Pratapgarh and three from Sultanpur. Nine children were injured by the pack in Jaunpur, followed by six in Pratapgarh and one in Sultanpur. While most of the children killed were very young — four months to five years old — Achee Lal of Chitawan village was nine. The wolves did attack a 13-year-old too but could not kill him. Deep incisions caused by canine teeth were found on the belly of Raj Kumar from Aluahi village in Jaunpur. There is still no trace of the body of six-year-old Susheel from Baseerpur village of Pratapgarh.

The district conservator in the Wildlife Department at Lucknow, Ashok Dikshit, said that it was the recovery of a half-eaten body of a child near a den in Pratapgarh district which led the contingent of forest officials and hunters to the wolves. Even as they were contemplating how best to get the wolves, a year-old cub and a pup of four to five



KILLED/INJURED BY WOLVES (BETWEEN MARCH 17 AND JULY 5, 1996)

JAUNPUR DIST.		
Victim	Police Station	Date of Incident
Ankith Kumar	Buxa	March 17 DEAD
Ram Pravesh	Badlapur	March 21 DEAD
Son of Ram Lal (4)	Badlapur	March 22 DEAD
Rohit Kumar	Sigraman	March 27 INJURED
Raj Kumar	Badlapur	March 28 INJURED
Dharmendra (3)	Sigraman	April 4 INJURED
Guddu (9)	Maharajganj	April 9 INJURED
Suman Devi (5)	Maharajganj	April 10 INJURED
Achee Lal (9)	Buxa	April 12 DEAD
Mulayam Yadav	Maharajganj	April 14 INJURED
Daughter of Ram J. Patel (10)	Maharajganj	April 15 INJURED
Shyamji	Machhlishahr	June 20 DEAD

JAUNPUR DIST.		
Victim	Police Station	Date of Incident
Raja Murad (8)	Machhlishahr	June 24 INJURED
Ramesh (4)	Machhlishahr	June 24 INJURED
PRATAPGARH DIST.		
Raat ki Rani (4)	Patti	March 23 INJURED
Ibrahim	Patti	March 24 DEAD
3-year-old-girl	Patti	May 27 DEAD
Lime (5)	Patti	June 8 DEAD
Indu (6)	Patti	June 9 INJURED
Ramesh Kumar Singh (13)	Patti	June 9 INJURED
Jaiband Nisha (7)	Patti	June 11 INJURED
Nasreen (7)	Patti	June 12 DEAD
Susheel (6)	Patti	June 13 DEAD

Figures in brackets denote the age of the victim

PRATAPGARH DIST.		
Victim	Police Station	Date of Incident
Reena (3)	Patti	June 14 DEAD
Rekha (3)	Patti	June 17 DEAD
4-year-old-girl	Patti	June 22 DEAD
2-year boy	Mandatha	June 26 DEAD
12-year-old-girl	Kotwali	June 29 INJURED
7-year-old-boy	Kotwali	June 30 DEAD
Moin-uddin (10)	Mandatha	June 30 INJURED
Sindh (2)	Mandatha	July 1 DEAD
4-year-old-girl	Kunhdaur	July 5 DEAD
SULTANPUR DIST.		
Anita (6)	Kadipur	March 24 INJURED
Maudsom (4)	Tamarsapur	April 7 DEAD
Seema (4)	Kadipur	May 24 DEAD
Sundari (3)	Kadipur	May 29 DEAD

months came out of the den. The older cub was shot dead and the younger one captured.

In a report to the Environment Ministry, Ashok Singh said the pup was kept in a cage to attract the adult pair. A doll with recorded sounds of a crying child was kept near by. The next day, goats were offered as bait but the wolves kept away. The female, a nine- to 10-year-old adult, was found in the same den and shot dead just yesterday. Earlier in a den near Mandaha village in Jaunpur, another adult wolf was

sighted. It was shot at but escaped.

This should put an end to speculation as to whether it was wolves, hyenas or jackals that terrorised the local people for nearly four months. In fact, Ashok Singh, who has been maintaining right through that the child lifters are wolves, said the foot marks near the site of the killing on the night of June 27 and June 28 confirmed that it was wolves that were on the prowl. They led straight to a den where two wolves were sighted.

IE Graphics/B.K. Sharma Singh, who is still in Pratapgarh, told this Correspondent on telephone that the Kushpara area, near police station Prithviganj, is ideal wolf country. The den was in a ravine, close to the river Bakulahi. The natural prey of wolves is small mammals like hare, deer and ground-nesting birds. However, as these were scarce in the area, they had been killing goats until they took to attacking children.

Since the female wolf was old, it probably could not hunt even goats, Singh pointed out. Wol-

ves are generally good parents and the male and female stay with the pack. It is the mother that unites the flock.

Ranjit Singh, who was earlier looking after Wildlife in the Ministry of Environment and Forests and has just completed his book *Beyond the Tiger*, which has a chapter on wolves, says a pack needing food for pups can be trained by the mother to attack human prey. This becomes dangerous as the entire pack is let loose as child lifters. Nevertheless, man is not the normal prey of wolves and such incidents are rare.

Nocturnal animals, the wolves can come to the doorstep of a house and pick up babies sleeping next to their mothers. Apart from hiding in dens, in the monsoons wolves take cover in fields and even use the burrow of animals like the hyenas.

Quoting official reports, Ranjit Singh states that 624 people were killed by wolves in UP in 1878 while 2,589 wolves were destroyed. In the Punjab 14 people were killed by wolves and 1,120 wolves destroyed; in Bengal 152 people and 919 wolves were killed. Between 1879 and 1883 in Madras Presidency 211 wolves were destroyed when wolf hunters could claim a bounty of Rs 5 per wolf head. Between 1910 to 1914, a large number of people are reported to have been killed by wolves in Champaran district of Bihar and in the same period 115 people were killed in Hazaribagh district.

Why even in 1981, in just 10 months, a pack of six wolves killed 13 children (4-to 10-year-olds) and injured another 13 in Hazaribagh.

However, if wolves have killed they have also adopted babies and reared them as their own. William Sleeman (1858), famous for his suppression of the thugs in Central India, relates how a boy was seen running on all four with a pack of wolves. He was subsequently pulled out of a den of wolves in 1847. The boy could only growl and snarl and ate raw meat with tame dogs. Gordon Cumming (1884) also mentions wolf boys captured from packs in Uttar Pradesh. In 1953 a young boy was captured in the wilds and brought to Lucknow. He became famous as Ramu, the wolf-boy though no one had seen him with a pack.

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Court orders release of blind lions

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct. 31
Even as the Environment and Forest Ministry has as per instructions of the Delhi High Court formed a committee to reconsider the 1991 ban on use of tigers, panthers, bears and monkeys in circuses, a Mumbai court has ordered the release of the five blind lions and lionesses that were performing for the Golden Circus.

Just how long the performing lions were blind is not known but thanks to the efforts of a group of young animal lovers, who have come together under the banner of Ahimsa, the five lions are now enjoying their well deserved retirement in the Borivili National Park.

This latest case of cruelty to protected species is likely to be presented to the court along with the review report on lifting the ban.

In March 1991 when the ban on performing animals was imposed on circuses by the then Environment Minister Maneka Gandhi, the 60-member Federation of Indian Circus Owners admitted that there were 220 lions, 64 tigers, 22 panthers, 26 bears and 14 monkeys in their custody. A stay on the ban was sought on grounds of animals being the biggest attraction of a circus and several people would be rendered jobless if the circuses were closed.

Two months ago the federation brought before the court a study by Dr Marthe Kiley Worthington, done for the Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



(RSPCA), which maintains that animals can be trained to perform in a humane manner as well as transported more comfortably from city to city.

On this evidence, the high court has asked the Ministry to review its decision on the ban. The six-member review committee, headed by Mr S. K. Pandey, additional IG, forests, is expected to submit its report in a month's time.

Those supporting the ban on

animals in circuses, however, have found fault with Dr Worthington's report. They maintain a substantial part of her work is based on the study of one species of monkey — the rhesus monkey — and the RSPCA, which had supported the study has since disowned it and questioned the integrity of the author. They point out even this study shows that 40 per cent of the cats, particularly the younger ones, have to be poked and prod-

ded to enter the ring. Due to lack of exercise in a circus the animals are not as fit as they should be.

Those fighting a losing battle against cruelty to animals point out that compassion for all forms of life is enshrined in the Indian Constitution. They are worried not as much about the quantum of cruelty as the objective of the cruelty. By making tigers jump through burning hoops of fire or sit on stools waiting to take orders, the

very status of the king of the jungle is being undermined.

However, in its affidavit before the high court the Environment Ministry has adopted a softer line. It has said the circus should not acquire any new animals, the existing adults should be allowed to perform and cubs born to animals while with the circus should be given to zoos.

Illegal trade in wild birds flourishes despite ban

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct. 6

Since 1991 a total ban has been in effect on the trapping and trade of Indian wild birds. But the ban is only on paper as illegal trade in wild birds flourishes in almost all cities, towns and villages, according to WWF Traffic India's latest survey on live bird trade in Northern India.

Globally threatened endemic species of the Indian sub-continent, the Swamp francolin, Green munia and Finn's baya can be bought in the local markets for a song. All three species figure in the IUCN Red Data List. Of the other protected species being traded, 16 belong to Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act and 36 are listed in CITES (Convention on Trade in endangered species).

The Survey by Abrar Ahmed comes at a time when the *Bahelias*, *Chirimars*, *Pathamies*, the traditional bird trappers, have been waging a desperate battle against the ban which Traffic India feels is ineffective. The *bahelias* with the support of some powerful Janata Dal MPs, have been saying that they have been reduced to poverty as they do not have any other source of livelihood.

Ahmed's study points out that the real culprits of the illegal bird trade are city based dealers who mastermind trapping operations for commercial purposes and mint money. With the ban on trade coming into force overnight, the *Chirimars* and *Bahelias* had been left without any employment and with no other option left, they had

to continue their business clandestinely.

The report, based on the findings of 64 surveys in 57 trading establishments trapping areas in 36 cities, reveals that a flourishing trade exists in 250 species of birds in the markets of Northern India.

The biggest demand is for parakeets, particularly the rose ringed parakeets, and munias, both blackheaded and red.

The volume of the trade is mind-boggling. In and around Moradabad, Lucknow, Sitapur, Meerut, Varanasi, Rampur and Bareilly 10,000 to 20,000 munias are caught annually. An equally large number of parakeets are also caught.

Retail outlets (including hawkers) in Jama Masjid Delhi, Baheliya Toli in Varanasi and Nakhas Bazaar in Lucknow sell 200 to 300 birds a day. At the weekly Sunday

bazaar a thousand birds may be sold. Exotic species like budgerigas which are bred in captivity, accounted for 20 per cent of the bird trade. The number of waterbirds sold in just one season in UP is estimated at 40,000. The price of birds traded varies from a rupee each to a five figure mark, depending on the species and its availability. The high demand for parakeets ensures that its price does not drop, but because it is easily available, the price is not too high. Though easily trappable, the Great Horned owl commands a whopping price because it is captured only on specific demand. This also explains the high price of the raptor species.

The delightful songster Shama is sold by trappers for just Rs 25. But since it feeds only on certain insects, it is difficult to look after the

Shama which has a high mortality rate. So at the buyers' level the cost of the bird shoots up. Exotic species like the Fisher love bird, native to Africa, are sold for an absurdly low price of Rs 300 to Rs 400 a pair — considering the high cost of air lifting them. This could be because the love birds are bred in captivity in India. However, macaws and cockatoos command a high price.

The report highlights the regular smuggling of birds via Nepal and Pakistan. The massive demand for birds persists — while most of them are kept as pets, many are trapped as food, and for zoological and medicinal purposes. Birds are also captured for release functions and even for black magic and sorcery.

The report also delves into his-

tory to look at the role of birds during the days of the Mughals and even earlier. The quick to learn parakeets of Gagron were trained by local rulers to put burning sticks on cannons to set them off. The parakeet is also the most revered bird in the country. In several temples, says the report, they are still taught to chant the name of God Rama. They are also said to possess divine powers and even today help the roadside astrologer read fortunes.

The report makes a strong plea to rehabilitate the traditional bird trappers in zoos and to use their knowledge for scientific management and wildlife studies. It says the captive breeding of exotic species could help check the trade of wild species. Currently the high price of the exotics species of birds deters buyers.

Efforts on to find new abode for Siberian cranes

By Usha Rai

BHARATPUR, Nov. 7
With chances of Siberian cranes coming to Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, receding, international crane experts who have gathered here for the last three days are working towards a new flyway for the cranes as well as a new abode in the islands of Brahmaputra in Assam.

"We've failed to save the

Siberian crane, especially the central flock that comes to Bharatpur," admits Mr George Archibald of the International Crane Foundation (ICF) ruefully. Their numbers have plummeted to such an abysmal low that today there is just one breeding pair and several nonbreeding cranes of this flock in the basin of the Kunovat river, Siberia.

Studies show that the Siberian cranes are being hunted with guns as well as with slings and stones as they fly over Afghanistan and Pakistan. With the war continuing to rage in Afghanistan and no one willing to listen to the plaintive cries of the ICF, the Wildlife Institute of India has been given the responsibility of finding a new flyway from the eastern end of the Hindu Kush mountains, over Nepal, instead of over Afghanistan.

In Bharatpur, the number of wintering Siberian cranes has dropped steadily from 200 in 1964-1965 to three adults and a chick towards the end of this February. For two winters from 1993 to 1995

no Siberian cranes visited Bharatpur. Though Keoladeo may no longer be the home of the

migratory Siberian cranes, bird lovers can continue to feast their eyes on the non-migratory Sibes. This winter the ICF will release

five Siberian crane chicks, fitted with transmitter, at Bharatpur. Even if they leave the protection of the park, the transmitters will help us to reach and rescue them if in trouble," says Mr Archibald.

Claire Mirande, Director of Conservation, ICF, says though the breeding ground at Kunovat and the management at Keoladeo is good, the birds at Bharatpur are not that healthy.

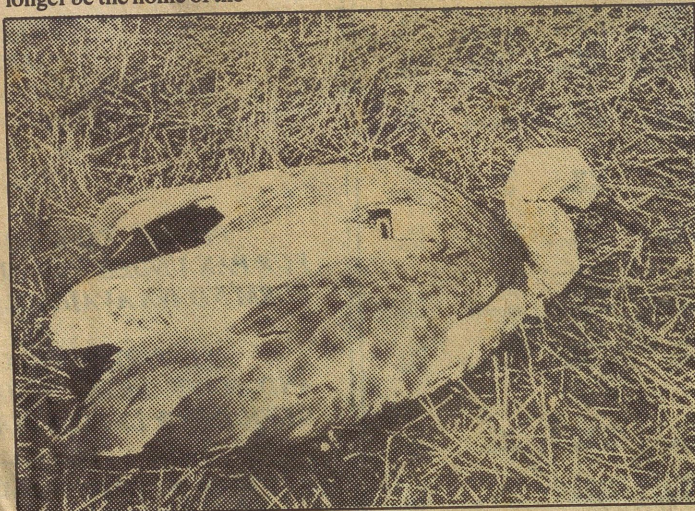
It is feared that the heavy use of pesticides for agriculture in the surrounding fields is taking its toll on the birds. As against 22 pairs of Sarus cranes in the early seventies, there are just five pairs this year.

The Wildlife Institute has been asked to do research on pesticides and their impact on birdlife in Bharatpur.

Keeping in view the dependance of the local people on agriculture, sustainable use of pesticides has to be worked out, she says.

The studies for attracting the Siberian cranes to a new wintering home in Assam have begun already. Mr B. C. Choudhury of

Continued on page 12 col 6



A hand reared blind-folded Siberian crane being fitted with a transmitter prior to its release in the wild at Kunovat river basin in Siberia.

New abode for cranes

Continued from page 1 col. 5

the Wildlife Institute, with the help of students of Guwahati University, visited 22 sites on the 600 km long Brahmaputra between last November and this March and found 12 sites, each with a dozen to 120 common cranes.

The largest of common cranes were found in two islands — Kumalia Chapori of Majuli and Gopal Chapori, near Panidihing, Sivasagar district. In Kumalia Chapori, 62 common cranes were sighted last December scattered over 5 sq kms and at Gopal Chapori 58.

The Wild Bird Society of Japan has also been talking of an alternate route for the Siberian cranes and backed its statement with a film showing the cranes coming over Nepal to the Brahmaputra.

This winter, six of these common cranes (three each from Kumalia Chapori and Gopal Chapori) are to be caught and fitted with the sophisticated PTTs (satellite telemetry tracking system). When they return home in March, the eastern flyway (east of Hindu Kush) will be confirmed, says Mr Choudhury. If this is established as a safer route, hand reared Siberian crane chicks will be released with the common cranes on a new migratory route.

However, the plans for establishing an eastern flyway for the Siberian cranes hinge on the availability of PTTs. Only the Japanese and the Americans are manufacturing the \$2000, 15 grams PTTs.

Mr Choudhury plans to involve the Assam Forest Department, the Rhino Foundation and Guwahati University in the studies to find a new wintering home for the Siberian cranes.



Waiting for the
Second Coupon?
News on Page 9

Save tuskers, yes; what about mahouts?

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 19
For centuries the art of handling an elephant, of making it do intricate chores in forestry or taking the king to the battlefield has been handed down from father to son. At a very young age the eldest son would be taken for a *haathi* ride and taught how to push and nudge with his feet and knees to steer the elephant through verdant jungles or firing cannons.

Now the mahout's children don't want to ride an elephant... at least not for a living. They prefer to drive shiny new cars or even the tough looking jeeps — for that would fetch them better wages. Since there are no schools to train mahouts and knowledge of elephantology comes the hard way through years of apprenticeship, the Project Elephant directorate is worried.

An important item on the

agenda of the steering committee of Project Elephant, which had its fifth meeting recently, was how to revive the fast fading profession of mahouts. As a first step it has been decided to raise the pay scales and perks of elephant keepers to that of drivers.

So far a mahout gets anything between Rs 750 to Rs 1,300 as basic salary. But unlike the chauffeur he gets no perks. Most of them don't even have a uniform. Though the steering committee has issued its fiat, improving the status, image and the wages of the mahout will ultimately be the responsibility of the States.

Apart from shortage of skilled elephant hands, there has been increasing conflict between elephants and mahouts. Anyone who can mount an elephant and ride it has a job for the asking. It is probably poor wages too that tempt mahouts to eat up rations meant for the animal in their care. The normally gentle elephant has a

prodigious memory and there have been instances when elephants have trampled to death their greedy keepers.

But the mahout who is able to establish that close bond with his animal has a protector for life. Remember Subedar Ali, the mahout of Corbett National Park who was descalped by a tiger but saved by his mount who picked him up, put him on its back and raced towards Dhikala forest lodge with the tiger trailing him for some distance.

Though the number of wild elephants has increased to over 25,000 (according to the 1993 census) and there are 500 protected areas, the forest department employs just over 200 mahouts — and even getting such a small number is proving difficult.

According to ancient Indian literature the elephant has 120 vulnerable points (*maramsthals*), 64 of these can be dexterously used

by mahouts for efficient control. A single blow on any of these sensitive points can help control an elephant in *musth* condition.

Mahouts, according to their nature, have been classified in Indian literature as *reghawan*, *yukthiman* and *balwan*. While the *reghawan* controls the elephant by love and friendship, fully understanding the characteristics of the animal under his care, the *yukthiman* is ingenious. The *balwan* mahout, however, tries to control the elephant by brute force often inflicting wounds and using harsh words. It is these mahouts, who are killed by angry and anguished elephants.

Selective poaching of tuskers continues in South India, Orissa and the North-East. Every year the forest department comes across 35 to 40 dead tuskers. Project Elephant may be able to save the elephants but who will save the mahouts?

New abode for Brindawan's vanara sena

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Nov. 27

The world's biggest project for translocation of animals will be executed late next month when half the simian population of Brindawan—500 to 600—will be caught in nets and moved to the Terai forests and Chameli Van, 60 km from the pilgrim city, in Uttar Pradesh.

The World Wide Fund, which runs a green Brindawan project, and Delhi-based NGO, Vatavaran, have decided to do the mammoth operation of catching the monkeys and rehabilitating them after the sadhus and local people of Brindawan pleaded that they be rescued from the Hanuman *sena* at a public hearing last year.

The man-monkey conflict has reached alarming proportions. Dr Iqbal Malik, primatologist, who is in charge of 'Project Translocation', said the city—with a resident population of about 5000 and a floating population of another 10,000—was unable to cope with the growing monkey menace. Hungry and aggressive the simians demand food. They grab goggles and spectacles from

visitors and will not return them till fed.

In the holy city people can no longer carry *jholas* or bags for the monkeys' snatch them away thinking they contain food. All homes, ashrams and rest houses in Brindawan are like cages in which human beings take shelter. For the last six years thick bars are like mandatory architectural designs in all buildings.

If humans are troubled by Brindawan's monkey brigade, the simians too are an unhappy lot, says Ms Malik. Most of them are sick. Their coats have lost the sheen and, as a behavioural scientist, Dr Malik suspects that the majority are suffering from tuberculosis. With the disappearances of the greenery, there is no natural vegetation for them to feed on. As much as 90 per cent of them depend on the residents of Brindawan for their meals. Many have learned to use their wits to stave off hunger.

Monkeys, who are lower down in the social hierarchy, are forced to eat from drains and rubbish dumps. Congestion in the city has also increased inter-group aggression. So translocation will help the primates too.

But before the exercise begins baseline studies on the monkeys of Brindawan and their habits have been done by Iqbal Imam of Aligarh University. Since the rhesus monkey come under

Schedule 2 of the Wildlife Protection Act, permission has been obtained from the Chief Conservator of Forests, UP, for the translocation project. Rajat Bhargav of WWF and Ajay Kumar of Vatavaran are working closely on the project.

The actual work of catching the animals in nets, which cause least injury, will be done by tribals of Bihar and UP who have been trapping wild animals for trade. Their abilities will now be put to positive use.

Some 30 young workers of Vatavaran will oversee the operation about two months till the monkeys are happily settled in their new abodes. After being caught the monkeys will be transferred in holding cages of bamboo. A fleet of vehicles are being kept ready to transport them.

In their forest homes, the monkeys will be kept in cages and for a week fed the kind of meals they were used to in Brindawan—chappatis, channa, bananas and even ladoos. Slowly they will be weaned off human food and the available forest food like neem pods, figs and ber increased. Chameli Van as well as the Terai belt in which they are being resettled are rich in 'bansa', a medicinal plant good for chest infections, and legumes of the 'papri' tree.

Since the Brindawan simians

have forgotten wild habitat, they will have to be taught to adapt the wild. It is only when Dr Malik is confident that the monkeys have been acclimatised that they will be released into the forests.

Since co-existence of man and monkeys is an intrinsic part of Indian culture, Dr Malik says a sizeable population will be allowed to live on in Brindawan. Though she has translocated two batches of monkeys, 60 each from Delhi zoo and AIIMS, to Tughlakabad, this will be Dr Malik's most challenging assignment. The operation has to be done scientifically and humanely and we cannot afford mistakes, says the primatologist.

AK-47s for tigers' protection proposed

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 23

An eight to 12-member Mobile Strike Force (MSF), equipped with wireless sets, guns, motorcycles and jeeps has been proposed for protecting the endangered tiger in each of the 22 tiger reserves of the country.

In reserves such as Nagarjunsagar, Andhra Pradesh; Manas, Assam; Dudhwa, Uttar Pradesh; and Indravati, Madhya Pradesh where terrorist and Naxalite groups are on the prowl, AK-47s have been proposed for the MSF. So far only 40 per cent of the tiger reserves have an MSF.

To boost the morale of the field staff, working in difficult terrain in remote corners of the country, such welfare measures as schooling and housing facilities for the

staff and a special allowance for those posted in tiger reserves has been recommended.

After the severe flak that India has received for tiger conservation work, 20 field directors of Project Tiger, four experts of the Steering Committee of Project Tiger and the Tiger Crises Cell and five chief wildlife wardens met over the weekend in Corbett National Park to work out a common strategy for saving the big cat.

The Indian High Commissioner to Britain, who was holidaying in Corbett, told the tigersmen that in UK there was great concern for the tiger and almost every day he was asked what India was doing to save the majestic king of the Indian jungles from extinction.

However, according to the Additional Inspector General of Forests, Mr S. C. Dey, pointed out mammoth effort would be needed.

Of the 3,750 tigers (Government figures) in the country, only a third are in tiger reserves. Another third of the tiger population is said to be in other national parks and sanctuaries. The rest are in general forest areas.

While the tiger population shot up between 1993 (when the last national tiger census was held) and 1995 in 14 of the 22 better managed and better equipped tiger reserves, 60 per cent of the tiger deaths were in general forests where they have no special protection or care. Poachers come in with cattle grazers and local people in search of fuel wood, Mr Dey said.

The comprehensive strategy evolved for protecting the tiger which includes increasing the prey base, reviving the auto-poaching intelligence network and enlisting the support of people living around forests would mean an in-

vestment of Rs 2,400 crore in the ninth Plan for wildlife conservation. In the eighth Plan it was only Rs 200 crore.

Every year, Mr Dey said, 30 forest personnel were killed in encounters with timber mafia and others. Very often the timber mafia goes on the offensive by registering complaints against forest officers.

Six new schemes that have been proposed by the Corbett meet include conservation of wildlife in general forest areas, welfare schemes for the forest staff, extension of compensation scheme for loss of life and crop in general forest areas, a system of rewards for those doing good work and compensation for projects that have to be moved out of forest areas like the ammunition dump in Rajaji National Park and the dolomite mines in Buxa Tiger Reserve.

3 poachers killed in encounter

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 23

Three Paite Naga poachers were killed in an encounter with the Kaziranga forest patrol on the night of December 20 at Laudubi, in the central Range of the biggest habitat of the one-horned rhino in the Asian sub-continent.

With their death, the number of poachers killed in the Kaziranga National Park has shot up to 47 in the last three years. The poachers were carrying a 303 rifle, about 25 cartridges and several fired shells.

Because of the vigilant forest guards and intensified patrolling at night, the number of incidents of poaching has dropped to 12 this year as against 40 cases annually till three years ago. Heading the team of forest guards were rangers

D. D. Bodo, a recipient of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) bravery award and S. Chakravarty. The six-member forest party had been alerted about the movement of poachers and were ready for them.

With a kilogram of rhino horn fetching over Rs 10 lakhs in the international market, poaching by Nagas, Nepalis, illegal Muslim migrants and Bodos had increased. The poachers infiltrate the villages fringing the National Park and have no qualms about risking their lives. They in turn recruit village shikaris and even ex-armymen for the actual hunting.

More than half the hunters are Nagas who have easy access to fire arms and are able to smuggle out the horns through Nagaland. In the encounter on Saturday night five to six rounds were fired by the Nagas and the forest guards retaliated by firing back.

Since the Naga poachers were armed and had some spent shells on them, they were probably planning to shoot the rhinos. However, there have been several instances when the poachers, afraid of being tracked down by the sound of the rifle shots, have dug pits inside the park and when the lumbering animal falls in breaking a leg, have jumped in, hacked off the horn and left it to bleed to death.

The forest guards in Kaziranga have been doing an excellent job despite shortage of funds for maintenance of roads in the park and for arms and ammunition. Even salaries are not reaching on time.

Though the forest treasury has 600 horns valued at several thousand crore rupees, no decision has been taken as yet on selling the horns and raising resources for improvement of the National Park and protection of the 1200 rhinos.

Man-animal conflict turns tuskers rogue

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI:

Stifled by urbanisation and with massive encroachments on their traditional migratory route, wild elephants have turned marauders, killing over 30 people in Assam and Bihar in the last one month.

While everyone is pointing an accusing finger at the jumbos and professional hunters are being engaged in North East Assam to shoot down two 'rogue' elephants, both States have virtually siphoned off close to Rs 1 crore meant for elephant care under Project Elephant.

According to sources in the Environment and Forest Ministry, Rs 51 lakh have been released for Project Elephant to Assam Government and Rs 38 lakh to Bihar Government in the last two/three years. But the money has not reached the forest department for reconstructing forest corridors or other works for the upkeep of the elephants.

Many States want to capture the wild elephants because their population has gone up. The Assam Government was even given permission two years ago to capture 20 elephants but so far only eight have been caught. While everyone is taking about the value of tiger skins and bones, few realise that the live elephant today costs as much as a Maruti Zen — Rs 5 lakh.

But the Centre is not convinced that the capture of a few wild elephants will reduce the man-tusker confrontation. Since *mahaldars* find it difficult to catch the big elephants, they go in for smaller ones of 6 to 7 years — who are about 7 feet high.

Elephant herds are a close knit and homogeneous. When a young tusker is captured, the entire herd goes on rampage. The Assam Government, however, maintains that capture of the baby jumbos is in no way related to the present angry mood of the herds.

It is the absence of forest cover and squatter colonies on traditional stomping grounds that makes hungry and angry elephants raid villagers for food. Over the years, the elephants have acquired a taste for *haria* or rice alcohol brewed by the tribals. In Assam some herds love sugarcane too.

Mr Vindo Rishi, Director of Project Elephant, says though in West Bengal and parts of Assam the elephant is still revered as Lord Ganesh there is increasing confrontation between man and animal in almost all the elephant range States. There is rampant encroachment, subsequently regularised, on traditional elephant routes linking different forests.

There are encroachments near the Teesta barrage of Siliguri. This was a centuries old migratory route of the elephants. Adjoining

areas have been illegally cultivated. In Assam, large areas of forest have been illegally felled and people have moved in.

The Saranda forests of Bihar too are excellent forests but here again large areas have been cleared and squatters have moved in.

The urban sprawl and tourist growth in Hardwar has totally overlooked the elephant's pilgrim routes thus blocking the Raiwalan forest corridors.

In the South it is Pykara hydel project near Singare adjoining Madumalai that blocks the migratory route of elephants. Grand development projects were conceived without consulting the forest department on the elephant routes. With the colonies of the development projects have become shopkeepers, transporters and others.

Though the elephant population has been going up and in the 1993 census stood at 25,000, by nature elephants avoid confrontation, says Mr Rishi.

About 900 elephants, in fragmented group of 9 to 25, may have to be written off as genetically unviable. In these smaller herds, due to poaching, the number of breeding bulls has dropped drastically.

Though endowed by nature with a life span of a hundred years, 65 to 100 elephants die annually due to poisoning, poaching, etc. The number of natural deaths may be just 40 to 50 a year. The number of people killed by elephants is also about 150 to 160 a year.

The Government gives Rs 20,000 as relief to the family of the dead. Some States manage to give Rs 50,000. But the forest department is conscious of the fact that it cannot really compensate for the life lost.

Since Project Elephant started two years ago 157 sq km of forest areas have been restored for movement of elephants in Meghalaya and UP. But the Centre has not been able to convince the Army to move its ammunition dump in Rajaji National Park.

Kesri, Pawar discuss Cong strategy

NEW DELHI, Jan. 22 (HTC)

The Congress leadership has decided to concentrate on economic issues in the Budget session of Parliament, beginning next month.

These issues are understood to have figured in a meeting today between party chief Sitaram Kesri and Mr Sharad Pawar, leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha.

Mr Pawar's meeting with Mr Kesri was for more than ninety minutes. Party sources said the two leaders also discussed the political situation and the Congress' strategy.

Tiger 'trapped' in crossfire

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI: Caught in the ugly crossfire between two international NGOs, Tiger Trust and World Wide Fund, both based in UK, is the Indian tiger. Both have used the threatened species, on the verge of extinction and a highly emotive issue in UK and the US, to raise millions of dollars for tiger conservation work.

Mr Michael Day of Tiger Trust, UK, dismissed by many in India as an upstart with virtually no grass-root experience, has in his latest book 'The big cat cover up, the truth behind the Indian tiger crisis' accused the WWF of raising \$7,50,000 in the name of the tiger and doing little to save it.

The Indian Government too has not escaped his poison darts. He questions the use of the \$24,93,744 budget of Project Tiger in 1994-95. Mr Vinod Rishi, looking after Project Tiger work in the Environment Ministry, not only questions Mr Day's credentials as a tiger specialist but says the Ministry was not even consulted for the report.

He says western conservationists have no idea of the complexity of the tiger habitat or the man wildlife conflict. Solutions drawn from the parks of the West do not apply to India, he says.

Mr Day's plans for saving the tiger are grandiose. He would like a budget of \$5 million in the first year for the Project Tiger network. With his latest report he would probably be able to whip up the fervour to raise that kind of money.

Mr Samar Singh, secretary-general of WWF-India — who was earlier with the Environment and Forest Ministry, says Mr Day's strategy is to run down the WWF

and corner the funds coming to it. Dismissing the report as sensational and exaggerated in many parts, Mr Singh says what does this foreigner know about village community in India or the interface of the tiger and the villagers.

He said last November the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), a comparatively new organisation forged by people who had walked out of WWF-India, sent to WWF-UK a report similar to the one put out by Mr Michael Day for publication. The report was referred for comments to

WWF-India, which pointed out that the report was unscientific and imbalanced. The report rejected by WWF-UK has now been incorporated in Mr Day's report, says Mr Singh.

Mr Tariq Azia of WWF-India, earlier with WPSI, says "the Day's report is accurate in that the situation on the tiger front is grim but it is exaggerated and its recommendations unimplementable." Mr Samar Singh is seething with anger at the manner in which Mr Day has tarnished the image of all those doing sustained tiger con-

servations work while boosting his own image as the saviour of the Indian tigers.

Contradictions between the WWF-India stand and that of the Trust are apparent. Mr Day maintains that 500 tigers have been killed in India in the last one year. (The Trust, he claims, has details of 95 tigers slaughtered last year.) Mr Day's 500 is more than Mr Valmik Thapar's, (Ranthambore Foundation) figure of "a tiger a day is killed in India."

Quoting independent tiger experts of the country, Mr Day maintains their number is down to less than 2,500.

WWF-India maintains that 70 tigers were killed in the last two years. WWF-India does not have its own statistics on the tiger population but the Government figures, based on the 1993 census, are 3,750 tigers in all including 1,079 in the tiger reserves in 1995.

While Mr Day maintains that the primary reason for the tiger being driven to the point of extinction is poaching, Mr Singh insists it is lack of habitat followed by poaching.

Mr Day recommends almost military-like patrolling operation by heavily armed guards and a new thermal imaging technique, to check poaching and to monitor people and wildlife day and night. For tracking the movement of tigers in the Tiger Reserves, he has suggested tagging the big cats and electronically monitoring their movements.

Mr Singh says the Trust recommendations are impractical and unimplementable. His own five-pronged strategy includes influencing policy and decision making, mobilising grassroot support in tiger range areas and assisting enforcement measures.



Tuskers under threat from meat lovers

From Usha Rai

GUWAHATI, June 9

For decades the elephant has been paying with his life for the exquisite white ivory tusks that nature has endowed him with. Now there is damning evidence of elephants being killed for the large quantities of meat they carry on their not so slender frame.

Whether the meat of an elephant has also acquired the status of a delicacy, like the brain of monkey, is not known. What is known is that in addition to the Nagas, Mizos and Lushais, who have traditionally eaten elephant meat, it is now consumed with relish by the Riangs of Tripura and the Khasis and Garos of Meghalaya.

Vivek Menon, who along with Raman Sukumar and Ashok Kumar of the Asian Elephant Conservation Centre and the Wildlife Protection Society of India has come out with a volume "A God in distress"—threats of poaching and the ivory trade to the

Continued on page 9 col. 1

Elephants under threat

Continued from page 1 col. 4

Asian elephants in India. The volume states, that elephant meat is now being processed and canned. It is sold in Meghalaya, Mizoram and is even being exported to Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Like the tiger, which has been pushed to the edge of extinction since people have found uses for every part of its body, the elephant has also become a commercially exploitable animal, says Bibah Talukdar of Guwahati University's zoology department.

In Karbi Anglong there is a tradition of elephant hunting, says Talukdar. For two or three nights, a herd is selected and chased and two or three elephants are killed for meat. This may happen twice in a year, he says. Talukdar is willing to condone this as a traditional practice based on personal needs. But he cannot overlook the commercial trade in elephant meat. In Karbi Anglong, elephant meat

cost Rs 40 per kg. In Meghalaya, it is sold for Rs 120 per kg, says Prof P. C. Bhattacharji, head of department of zoology, Guwahati University.

In fact, Dr Bhattacharji had been working on a biodiversity project in the Rani reserve forests, about 20-km from Guwahati, when he came across two elephant skulls. Investigations and talks with the villagers revealed that Mizo, Khasi, Karbi and Bodo youth were staying in the forest for collecting "food". A herd of about 25 elephants used to visit the Deeper Beel (elephant wetland) adjoining the forest.

The hunters had used sophisticated guns to bring down the elephants. The villagers of Satargaon reported that the elephant meat was dried to make lighter and easier to transport. It was smoke-dried on a bamboo frame and salted.

Dr Battacharji says elephant legs are converted into stools. A set of four legs would fetch the

poacher Rs 40,000 in addition to whatever he earns on the meat.

Vivek Menon maintains that the meat is smuggled out of the forests in sacks piled into private jeeps or trucks. Timber trucks in the West Khasi hills and coal trucks are often used for the purpose. Sometimes, the timber trucks are seized at gun-point and used for carrying the contraband. Even as Atomic Energy Station vehicle was taken at gun-point in the West Khasi hills for transporting the meat, the volume on the elephant states.

At one stage, elephant meat was being openly sold in some markets of Nongstein, Shillong and Guwahati. However, measures taken by the authorities in Shillong seem to have driven the trade underground. And yet, 11 sacks of elephant meat was confiscated and two persons arrested last month. Now, traders are indenting the weekly requirements of their regular customers and delivery is made every Monday.

COMMENT

In the name of the tiger

There are 'big cats' in India and outside the country much worried about the survival of the tiger in this country. But is the roar more a mew for making money, asks Usha Rai

NEVER before has the royal Bengal tiger been in the eye of a storm as it is today. In a span of about a month, two international organisations — Environmental Investigation Agency and the Tiger Trust — based in London have come out with two voluminous and scathing attacks on India for not doing enough to protect the majestic king of the Indian jungles.

Much of the concern stems from the fact that two-thirds of the tigers in the world are in India and if they are wiped out from here there is no hope of their survival elsewhere. Both reports are remarkably similar and extremely well documented even if one disagrees with their statistics on the number of tigers being killed — 500 a year, according to Michael Day of the Tiger Trust and one a day according to Dave Currey of EIA.

It is also clear that the material has been provided by NGOs in India, many of which have worked for the Government and some which continue to be its advisers. Having failed in their efforts to save the tiger they have now turned to international agencies to add on pressure and make a fast buck.

And they have done a remarkable job. The appeal to the Prime Minister "to reinstate real priority and political will in saving the last of India's wild tigers" is signed by 34 big cats of the European and American wildlife conservation arena. Ironically it is also signed by the Director-General of WWF — International Claude Martin. Michael Day's full-sate last month, it may be recalled, was against WWF — India, which had launched Project Tiger in 1975

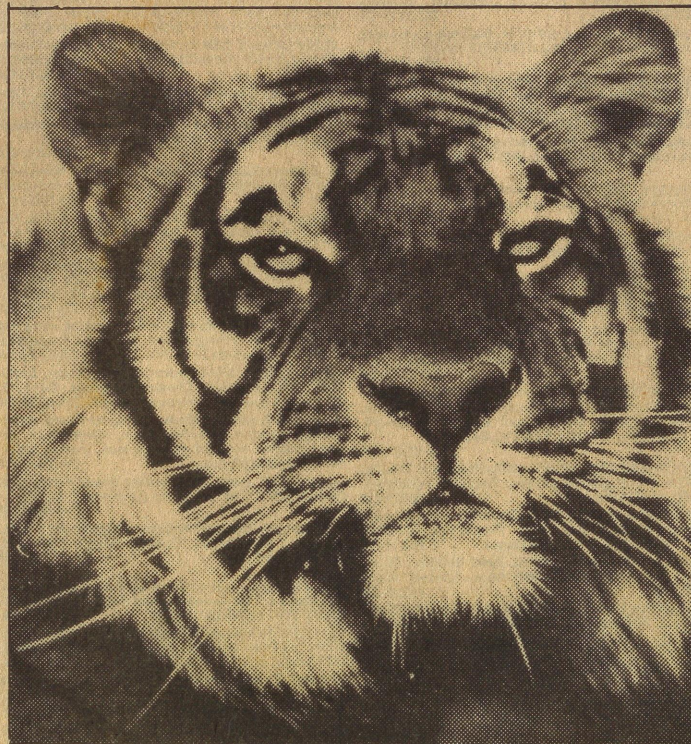
but which, he maintained, was not using the money it had raised in the name of the tiger to save it.

While it is true that the tiger has a bleak future, the motives of the NGOs raising the hue and cry are questionable. It's basically a money game. There is so much love for the tiger in the West that donors are willing to pour out their hearts and purses to save this magnificent creature that represents the apex of the eco-system.

WWF — UK is believed to have raised \$7,50,000 in the name of the tiger. It is difficult to tell how many NGOs are in the tiger game because they genuinely care for the survival of the species and how many are in it for the loot.

In India too there are NGOs which are basically working for wildlife and protected areas and others which don't really care for animals — be it the elephant, the tiger, the neelgai or the rhesus monkey. Those fighting for the survival of human beings claim to be of a higher order. So attempts to move the Gujjars from the Rajaji National Park and reconstruct forest corridors for movement of elephants and greater security of the tigers have failed.

In fact so great are the differences between Indian NGOs, and between NGOs working for the tiger and Government officials responsible for wildlife and forest care that a tiger census, normally done once in four years, has not been held since 1993. This should be done post-haste. Whether the census should be through a pug mark study or by the use of some other modern technique should be resolved within the country. India has enough expertise in



the country and does not need foreigners to dictate to it.

The tiger cannot be saved unless protected areas are saved. Both reports indicate that the tigers are disappearing largely because of poaching. But habitat destruction is a major reason for wildlife disappearance and the increasing confrontation between man and wildlife.

There are reports of large-scale mining in most national parks and

sanctuaries. Forests are being ruthlessly destroyed. Between 1989 and 1993 there was a 1418 sq.km. decrease in the forest cover of the North East, the home of the Indian rhino, elephant, tiger and other creatures.

Do Michael Day or Dave Currey really think the Prime Minister will save the tiger when in one go he hands over clearance of power projects up to Rs 4,000 crore to the States? In fact, he even had a dig at

the anti-development environmentalists who make such a hue and cry about saving a few fish. There has been no real protest on what this kind of power to the States would do to the country's environment.

There is no political will for saving the environment, no real commitment to check the pollution even in the Capital of India — so why appeal to the PM to save the tiger? Both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi had an innate love for nature and its bounties and would retreat into national parks to rest and recuperate.

If Silent Valley was saved it was because there was a truly committed environmentalist at the helm of affairs then. Neither Narasimha Rao nor Deve Gowda have that concern for wildlife that stems from an emotional bonding when you see a big cat on the prowl or an elephant playing with its calf.

In fact, Prime Ministers should not head organisations like the Indian Board for Wildlife for, experience shows, that they will never have time for it when they are fighting for their own political survival. It is better to have committed wildlifers with the right contacts.

Why are these committed tiger lovers not putting as much pressure on the countries that are importing tiger bones and skins? While the bones go East for making exotic medicines, most of the skins go to the West. There is no attack on the western countries importing tiger skins for this could affect fund raising.

Kamal Nath, with his Doon School background, did care for the tiger and started a Global Tiger

Forum to provide special assistance and care to tigers in the 13 tiger range countries. India is putting in \$10,000 annually into the GTF kitty. But the contribution from others is pathetic — £50,000 from UK to be given to NGOs for training and \$50,000 from Norway. This is all the money available for use in the 13 tiger range countries. Even this money has not been fully used. Only \$16,600 has been spent on training in Vietnam.

If the millions of dollars being raised by NGOs in the name of the tiger can be put into this kitty it could be better used to equip India's forest guards with wireless sets, rifles and jeeps so that they can protect the area in their care better.

Protecting the Indian tiger is basically the responsibility of the Government, however, bureaucratic and callous it may be. Like the Taj Mahal cannot be given to others to maintain, the tiger has to be protected by Indians within its green spaces. While UNEP has expressed its inability to provide any funds, the US National Fish and Wildlife Foundation want a great say in the use of the money. The 34 signatories to the letter to the PM should also contribute to the fund.

The Indian Government's investment in its protected areas and tiger reserves is Rs 25 crore or \$8 million a year. This is peanuts for such a vast area. Of the 3,750 tigers (Government figures), only 1,079 are in protected areas. With their numbers dwindling the Lakshman Rekha of protection will have to be enlarged. It is time that the truly tiger-loving NGOs and countries put their money where their mouth is.

Jarawas attack to save a shrinking habitat

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, April 15

IN a symbolic gesture of protest, Jarawa tribals of South Andamans surrounded and killed two forest labourers and injured three others while they were engaged in logging operations at Pottatang, near Poona Nallah along the Great Andaman Trunk Road on March 29.

The hands of the labourers were hacked off with the same axes which they were carrying for what was a legally sanctioned forest operation.

Samir Acharya of the Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology, who is in New Delhi for a World Wildlife Fund for Nature workshop on bio-diversity, told this correspondent that the timber extraction camp is quite close to the area reserved as Jarawa habitat.

The attack took place despite

the loggers being escorted by armed guards of the Forest Protection Force (FPF).

Like a herd of wild elephants or tigers protecting their shrinking habitat, the Jarawas who are feeling threatened ever since the Great Andaman Trunk Road increased logging and poaching in their territory, attached the 12 to 15 labourers with bows and arrows.

Though the FPF fired to deter the Jarawas, they stood their ground and it was forest contractor's men who had to flee.

The five who could not escape were surrounded and two of them killed. Quite obviously the Jarawas cannot distinguish exactly where their territory ends and that of the forest department begins.

In the unwritten laws of the jungle that they observe, the entire pristine belt is theirs and only theirs.

Inspector General of Forests in Delhi M F Ahmed was blissfully

unaware of the confrontation between tribals and forest labourers in the richest tropical forests of the country. He said the Additional IG Forests S K Pandey, who was to visit the Islands this week, would investigate and report back to him.

Acharya said, while the official figure of the number of Jarawas alive is 200 to 250, those attacked maintain they were surrounded by 100 to 400 tribals.

Quite obviously, the Government does not really know how many Jarawas live in the South Andamans. There are several groups of Jarawas in South and Middle Andamans (official Jarawa territory) but others have been sighted in Bartang and Rutland islands too.

There have been doubts about the advisability of having a timber extraction camp so close to the Jarawa territory ever since

the road construction began some 20 years ago.

There have been attacks almost every year, particularly during the summer months when the Jarawas move from the deep interiors of the forest in search of water. But the killing this year has frightened the forest officials as well as the labourers.

Even when the water pipes were laid along the Andaman Trunk Road, the Jarawas showed their displeasure by jamming them with wood. The axing of the hands is another symbolic gesture to the forest department to stay off their terrain.

Apart from the official extraction of timber, there have been reports of illegal felling of trees and poaching of wild life. Though the Jarawa territory is rich in spotted deer, the tribals never kill them. They do, however, hunt the wild boars with their bows and arrows.

About 20 days ago a container load of padauck (timber) was seized in the Madras and Andaman Administration alerted about the illegal shipment of timber.

Forest officials in the Andamans immediately began investigations and seized 126 cubic metre of illegally extracted timber. Two forest officials were suspended, Acharya said.

Though the Island Development Authority said that not more than a lakh cubic metre of timber should be extracted from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands annually, the total extraction, according to the forest department is 1.35 lakh cubic metre.

This year, Acharya said the timber industry had been allotted 1.65 lakh cubic metre. In addition there is illegal extraction. Can anyone then blame the Jarawas for trying to protect their only refuge - the forests, asks Acharya.

Battle of wits in forests of Kaziranga

By Usha Rai

KAZIRANGA, June 20 Saving the rhinos from poachers, nursing dreams of quick money on their priceless horns, has become a wily game of wits in the forests of Assam.

With a kilogram of rhino horn priced at Rs 25 to Rs 30 lakhs in the international market, poachers have infiltrated the villages fringing the National Park and have no qualms about risking their lives.

Alert forest guards, however, have increased their vigilance over the 1,200 rhinos in their care and in the last six months some 43 poachers have been challenged and shot dead.

In a quick change of tactics poachers have now gone back to the traditional method of hunting. They dig pits on rhino tracks inside the 430 sq kms park and when the huge animal falls in, very often breaking a leg in the process, they quickly move in for the kill and

Fund-starved

KAZIRANGA: While Assam's programme for conservation of the rhino has suffered for what of funds, some 600 rhino horns valued at Rs 12 crore to 15,000 crore are lying in the State Government's forest treasury.

The horns, which have been collected over the last 20 years, are removed when rhino dies of old age or some other ailment. Some have even been recovered from poachers. But as per the convention on International Trade in Endangered Species there can be no trade in rhino horns.

hack off the horn. The named animal bleeds to death.

This new, cruel method of trapping the rhinos has been resorted to because gun-shot killings were alerting the forest guards w

quickly moved in and gunned down the poachers. Rhinos are also being electrocuted with live wires being removed from poles and deliberately dropped in their tracks. There have even been instances of rhinos being poisoned to death.

The poachers, who seem to know all the movements of the forest guards, are also doing their sleuthing and hunting when the vigil is slack with guards having lunch or changing duties.

But with the rhino population booming—there are about 100 babies born every year—quite clearly the forest department is currently ahead in the battle of wits in and around Kaziranga.

Mr D. S. Bonal, field director of the park, gives all credit for the rhino killings dropping from 40 to 45 in the mid-eighties to 25 to 30 a year in the last two years. Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury, chief executive of the Rhino Foundation for Nature in the North-East, however, warns against any slackening of vigil.

Dr Choudhury says the demand for horns is from Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, Thailand, Singapore and Yemen in the Middle-East. In Yemen it is used in dagger handles by the rich and famous. The poaching operations are masterminded by businessmen in Siliguri, Guwahati and Calcutta. They contact the poachers who may be Nagas, Assamese, Nepalis, illegal Muslims or Bodos. They in turn recruit the hunters—village *shikaris* and even ex-armymen. They make anything from Rs 30,000 to Rs 50,000 for each horn delivered.

However, more than half the hunters are Nagas who have easy access to fire arms. The export route of the horns is also through Nagaland.

The Rhino Foundation set up in 1994 with funding from some 90 tea garden companies, has played an important role in building awareness against poaching. A lot of the rhinos are shot in the monsoons when they leave the security of the park to cross over to the high grounds of the tea gardens. The

US Fish and Wildlife Department is providing funds for follow up of the poaching cases.

As direct incentives to the field staff, the Foundation has been distributing water filters to the forest camps and hunting boots, rain-coats and warm sweaters to guards.

However, the forest guards need training in use of rifles and the initiative has to come from the Government. They also need country boats, speed boats and elephants for patrolling inside the national park.

Plans to expand the protected area of the rhino territory by 490 sq. kms and ensure a corridor for their migration to the hills in the monsoons is proving difficult. People have gone to the court and got stays on acquisition of their land. But if the rhino is to be saved and protected there is urgent need to acquire some 43 sq. kms at Burapahar where migrating rhinos run straight into the bullets of poachers.

Arunachal forest cover 'shrinking fast'

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Jan. 4

After an inspection of the forests of Arunachal Pradesh in November 1992, the then Inspector-General of Forests, Mr A. K. Mukherji, reported — "as a result of uncontrolled felling from accessible areas the degraded forest area has increased by 78 sq kms between 1987 and 1989."

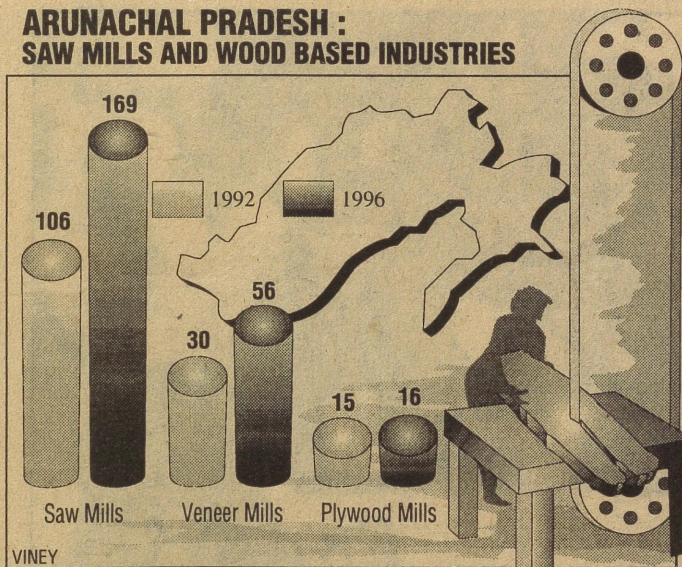
Among all the North-Eastern States, Arunachal Pradesh has the largest forest area. It also has the maximum degraded forests covering an area of 14,491 sq kms, which is almost a fourth of the State's total forest cover of 68,661 sq kms.

Following the Supreme Court interim order to halt the dilution of the 1980 Forest Conservation Act (FCA), the Arunachal Cabinet descended on the Capital last week to plead with the Prime Minister and others in power that the State, whose survival depends on forest-based industries, should be given special status and not be governed by the FCA.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has been monitoring the vandalism of forests in Arunachal Pradesh for at least eight years now and has repeatedly warned the State to fall in line. Mr Mukherji's report is a damning indictment of the State's concern for its green gold. "The State was in fact killing the goose that lays the golden egg," an official stated.

The Centre's warning not to increase the number of saw mills has gone unheeded. The Chief Minister told a Press conference last week that the State had licenced 169 saw mills, 56 veneer mills and

ARUNACHAL PRADESH : SAW MILLS AND WOOD BASED INDUSTRIES



16 plywood mills. In 1972 end, when Mr Mukherji visited the State, only 151 wood-based industrial units had licences — 106 saw mills, 30 veneer mills and 15 plywood units.

The 151 wood-based units, Mr Mukherji said required 4.19 lakh cum which is 50 per cent higher than the extraction from the forests. Mr Mukherji said no further licences for saw mills should be issued since it could lead to large-scale illegal felling.

Media efforts to find out who owned these saw mills were cleverly evaded at the CM's Press conference in the Capital. The truth should be out when the Government files its affidavits before the Supreme Court.

Mr Mukherji was also critical of the sudden reduction in the girth of trees allowed for felling without consulting the Forest Research Institute or the Centre. Its reduction from 180 cms to 150 cms, resulted in increased fell of trees. To protect good seed trees, he recommended that the girth of trees selected for felling should immediately be raised back to 180 cms.

Most of the 8,000 tree permits given annually to local people, to meet their timber requirements, Mr Mukherji found, were being sold to forest-based industries. There was pressure to even increase the number of permits. What is worse, is that Mr Mukherji suspected that at least 50 per cent

more trees than the stipulated 8,000 were being felled. This was worked out on the volume yield of 50 lakh cft which is said to have been extracted from 8,000 trees.

Mr Mukherji suggested that the annual permits given to local people should be reduced to 6,000 and the permit system intensively monitored. The marking of trees to be felled should be done by an officer of the rank of at least an assistant conservator of forests. The Supreme Court's interim order also states that fellings against permits could be done by the Forest Department only.

Harvestable unclassified forests in districts, it was recommended, should be divided into 10 parts and markings should be done in each part only once in 10 years giving forests a chance to recuperate.

Mr Mukherji recommended that forest-based industries should be allowed forest timber only for 10 years. Thereafter, they should raise their requirement of raw materials in the village reserve forests in collaboration with the people.

While the revenue from forests increased steeply contributing to a-fifth of the total State plan, the State's allocation for forests had dropped to just three per cent of its budget, Mr Mukherji said it should be raised to at least 10 per cent of the Eighth Plan outlay.

Mr Mukherji, who saw illegally felled trees floating down the Brahmaputra, recommended a special forest protection force for patrolling and protection of forests along the inter-State borders. It will now be upto the State Government to convince the courts that it does value its forests.

Villagers, foresters 'wage a battle'

From Usha Rai

RANTHAMBHORE, Feb. 1) *Apne ladke ko kaphan bandke bhejna* (send your son with his coffin) is the threat held out to families of forest officers and guards of Ranthambhore National Park who have dared to check illegal grazing in the core area of one of the country's most exquisite tiger reserves.

The number of cattle grazing in the park has dropped from 40,000 a couple of years ago to about 4000 in 1997-98. Better management has yielded a baby boom in the tiger population which is about 30 today and this winter several tourists have gone home warmed by the sight of tigresses playing with their cubs.

But the guardians of the park are reaching the end of their tether. Ten posts of forest guards, three of assistant foresters and five of foresters are lying vacant because there has been a lot of confrontation with villagers and no one wants to risk their heads being broken by graziers. Currently the park is even without a field director because the earlier director, Mr Chaudhary, has been transferred and till the elections are over there is a stay on fresh appointments.

No politician speaks out against

grazing though everyone knows it is illegal. The Khandar area of the park is the worst affected. On Sept. 19 the Deputy Superintendent of Police, the District Magistrate and the deputy field director were abused and pelted with stones when they went to the core area to stop illegal grazing. Two

Tiger boom

THERE has been a baby boom in Ranthambhore National Park. Four tigresses with 11 cubs can be seen frolicking and hunting in the park. The cubs are 6 to 18 months and the older ones are likely to be separated from their mothers soon.

Park authorities, however, are concerned about a tigress, mother of three cubs, that has injured one of its front legs and has been limping. A careful watch is being kept on the tigress so that she and her cubs do not starve. Attempts are on to give antibiotics in the kill that is being provided to the tigress or in water kept in tubs.

If the wound does not heal, the park authorities plan to tranquillise the tigress after the cubs have been weaned and then treat her.

foresters were injured in the skirmish. Nine FIRs were lodged by the forest department on the attacks on them but no action has been taken—the excuse given is that the foresters could not name the missile-wielding villagers but in fact no one wants to touch this vote bank of Gujjars and Meenas.

In Bodal village a forest station was attacked and when the foresters retaliated by firing in self-defence a villager was killed. A forester and a forest guard were put behind bars for three months and have now been transferred to Sariska. Though they had fired in self-defence the case is still on. The foresters, who had been provided with firearms just recently, have returned them if they are not backed with the authority to use them.

On Oct. 20 after driving off the graziers the forest guards trekked about 20 kms with 350 buffaloes to a cattle pond. The cattle were returned to the villagers on their paying a penalty of Rs 12,000. But the foresters responsible for the action have been identified and they and their families threatened.

Mr G.V. Reddy, the deputy field director, says helmets are being acquired for the foresters but this slows down mobility in the hilly terrain. "It is like entering my home (my forests) with helmets—I can't understand this," says Red-

dy.

Between July to September last year, the height of the grazing season, the forest department requisitioned the services of 100 lathi-wielding cattle guards of the social forestry division and the police to drive away cattle and villagers.

The basic problem is not one of poverty but villagers—rich and poor—wanting access to a free resource. In fact if the really poor need fodder, the park could provide it from the buffer zone. Two NGOs—WWF and the Ranthambhore Foundation—have been working with the villages fringing the park. They run biogas and fodder programmes for villagers and help in forest development.

Now the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank are providing Rs 38 crore over the next four years for development of 112 villages around Ranthambhore National Park and the adjoining Sawai Mansingh and Keoladevi sanctuaries. Thirty per cent of the fund is for protected area management.

The forest department wants a strike force for effective protection of the 450 sq. kms park, it wants vacant posts filled by committed wildlifers and a hard duty allowance for these foresters. Above all it wants harmony with the villagers.

Ban on visitors to national parks mooted

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, March 21

A ceiling on visitors to national parks, sanctuaries and tiger reserves, and a ban on tourism in the core area of parks, have been proposed in the revised guidelines for wildlife tourism in protected areas.

These guidelines were presented to the Indian Board for Wild Life at its recent meeting. However, the board, which is to meet again soon, could not discuss them.

Quite clearly, the general feeling is that parks and tiger reserves are primarily supposed to conserve nature and genetic resources. Though tourism activity is welcome, it is seen as subservient to conservation.

The signal from the Ministry of Environment and Forests and those interested in protected areas is "don't kill the goose that lays golden eggs."

The sheer quantum of visitors to a few parks and tiger reserves and their unregulated activity, has alarmed wildlife enthusiasts.

While Sabarmalai in the south has the largest number of visitors, about 30 lakhs a year and most of them pilgrims, about 20 per cent of the better known parks draw anything from 20,000 to 50,000 visitors in a year.

Tourism to these parks is, however, limited to a few months

in the year. Though the wild life tour operators are making good money, the return to the parks is barely 2 to 3 per cent of their annual expenditure on the parks.

The 'Bharatpur bird sanctuary, however, is able to recover about 30 per cent of its total expenses from tourism.

The protection of the sanctum sanctorum or core area of parks has been considered vital not only for long term research but to gauge the health of the entire sanctuary.

The responsibility of deciding the number of visitors to be allowed inside the parks has been left to the park directors.

Each protected area will have to draw up its own tourism plan, clearly indicating areas open to tourism and closed to it.

For a large protected area more than one spot for tourism is to be developed — preferably in the peripheral area so that tourist pressure is distributed but yet all of them enjoy the flora and fauna.

Restriction on setting up of hotels within a kilometre of the boundary of protected areas has been mooted. In fact, it has been suggested that the park authorities should be consulted before clearances are given for hotels based on the carrying capacity of parks.

At Bandipur, Corbett and Periyar hotels have come up just outside the parks. A private company has been pushing hard for its hotel complex outside Nagarhole.

Trawlers leave a trail of turtles' death

By Usha Rai

BHITARKANIKA, Feb. 9 There is a macabre sequel to the annual miracle of life on the Orissa coastline when thousands of Olive Ridley turtles take over select beaches to lay lakhs of eggs for survival of their species. A sizeable percentage of the eggs get destroyed by predators like jackals, hyenas and dogs or are washed away by eroding beaches.

This year even as the first batch of some 20,000 turtles waddled up the beaches of Rushikulya on the night of Jan. 31, on their pilgrimage of procreation, over 300 dead turtles were washed ashore on the other important nesting beach of Ekakulanasi — their heads smashed, their flippers axed.

The unfortunate turtles found that their rookery at Gahirmatha had become their graveyards even before they could come in to nest.

Despite the ban imposed on deep sea trawling in a radius of 20 kms around Gahirmatha and on mechanised fishing 5 kms off the coastline, at any time 50 trawlers can be seen operating along this important coastal stretch.

According to Mr Banka Behary Das, president of the Orissa Krushak Mahasangh, the trawlers belong to people from West Bengal, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. Officers of the patrolling naval vessels even had skirmishes with some trawler operators in the third week of January, says Mr Das. In a letter to Chief Minister J. B. Patnaik, he complained that the top brass in the Government, instead of being grateful to the Navy, had raised objections forcing the Navy to retire in disgust to its base in Vishakapatnam.

Bivash Pandav of the Wildlife Institute of India, who is doing a five-year study of the turtles and their nesting habitats along the Orissa coast, says between

December 1993 and May 1994 5,200 dead turtles were found on the Orissa coast, 4000 of them in the 35 kms of Gahirmatha coast. The turtles had got entangled in the fishing gear of the mechanised vessels and had suffocated or were beaten to death by boatmen desperate to free their nets.

For some inexplicable reason the turtles had chosen to come first to Rushikulya this year. They came for five successive dark nights and disappeared at dawn. Till Saturday morning there was no sign of them at the four kms stretch of Ekakulanasi beach of Bhitarkanika.

But protecting the beaches, where the world's largest mass nesting of turtles takes place, has been an uphill task. Trawlers and mechanised fishing vessels continue to spew death and destruction. Prawn farms with their array of lights, have come up quite close to the nesting beaches,

causing a great deal of disturbance.

Young turtles, who are supposed to race to the sea within hours of hatching, are often drawn to lights of prawn farms and chemical factories (near Rushikulya) and run in the wrong direction. In the process they get entangled in the weeds and undergrowth of the casuarina plantations that have come up on most Orissa beaches as cyclone barriers and are killed by crows at day break.

Now a new threat has emerged in the form of the Defence Research Development Organisation's missile testing base at Chandipur-on-sea. Shortts and Wheeler Islands, which are the target range under this programme, are barely 100-500 mts from the Ekakulanasi rookery at Gahirmatha. The two successful test fires have already changed the islands topography, says Pandav. More such firings could have a

serious impact on the sea turtle nesting. Even an accidental shift in the target firing towards Gahirmatha could be catastrophic.

However, the other great champion of the turtles, Mr Das, has used his considerable clout to get an assurance from Mr Abdul Kalam, scientific adviser to the Defence Minister, that there will be no test firing from November to April (when mass nesting and hatching takes place); the lights at Wheeler Islands would be masked and Defence establishments will ensure that Coast Guards and Naval ships prevent mechanised trawlers and fishing boats from poaching operations in the nesting period.

Fortunately in Mr Kalam, Mr Das has found a soulmate for the protection of the turtles but there is no love lost for these voiceless sea creatures in the political and business circles of Orissa or the adjoining States.

Continued on page 11 col 3

Trawlers leave trail of death

Continued from page 1 col. 5

How else can one explain the large number of fishing jetties that are coming up on the Orissa coast. Though the construction of the one at Talchua, inside the wildlife sanctuary of Bhitarkanika has been stayed by the High Court, more fishing jetties are proposed at Tantiapala, Jamboo and Kharnasi, all in the Mahanadi delta and in contravention of the coastal zone regulation. Many proposed jetties are close to turtle nesting sites. More jetties means more trawlers and mechanised crafts. Greater fishing activity could well deter the turtles from coming to the Orissa beaches to nest.

Since turtle nesting has been observed at Gahirmatha, Paradeep, Kujang, Devi, Puri, Chilka and Ganjam coasts, Bivash Pandav and his team have suggested a network of protected areas on the Orissa coast. Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary needs to be upgraded to a marine national park.

Andamans' ecology faces threat

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Nov. 11

The little emerald islands of the Andamans and its rich tropical forests are the latest victims of the economic resurgence so apparent in the rest of the country.

Even as the recent State of Forests Report shows a nine sq. km. or 9,000 hecs loss of forest cover in North Andamans, a team of officials from the Southern Railways were recently in the islands surveying for the proposed railway line from Port Blair in South Andaman Islands to Diglipur in North Andamans.

A brainchild of former Lt.-Governor Vakkom Purushothaman, if the railway project is allowed to go through, it would cause incalculable damage, warn all those watching with

concern, developments in the Andamans.

Further, there were almost 70 units quarrying for sand in these fragile islands and when their closure was ordered for violating the coastal zone regulation that prohibits any industrial activity 200 metres of the high tide line, the Congress MP from the Islands went on hunger strike demanding their reopening.

The environmental mauling of the Andamans has disturbed INTACH and the Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology. Despite their ecological importance and fragility, the islands are so far away from the mainland that very little news of the destruction reaches the Centre. The Island Development Authority meetings are not held regularly.

Because of the logging operations, almost every stream is silted. When Rajiv Gandhi was Prime Minister, he took special interest in the conservation of these islands. He had said that forestry operations in the Andamans should be reduced to half in 10 years and then phased out. If necessary, he said, import wood to meet the needs of people and industry.

But Mr Kamal Nath in his tenure as Environment and Forest Minister, arbitrarily increased timber extraction from the islands. Inspector General of Forests, M. E. Ahmed, however, assured that timber extraction was being reduced from 1.15 lakh cubic metres annually to 1 lakh cubic metres.

The three major forest-based industries operating in the islands

are Andaman Kitply and Kitply construction (running past) was resented by people who killed mahout and a earlier this year Chief Conservator Oberoi, who meeting, said to extract timber occupied by them.

Mr Samir A has pointed out of the North A which include Andaman Islands just two years it reflects not just felling but den of vegetation.

Mr Acharya department ge

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Gangotri is receding, says expert

NEW DELHI, Nov. 9 (HTC)

Flooding of the mighty Brahmaputra has been an annual feature. But the International Commission of Snow and Ice (ICSI) predicts that if the current global temperature increase of 0.5 degrees C stabilises the Gangotri glacier will recede further and there will be less water in the river.

Mr Syed Iqbal Hasnani of the School of Environmental Sciences, JNU, and chairman of ICSI's working group on the Himalayan glaciers warns that by the year 2030 the water level in the Bhagirathi will be affected and agriculture output will suffer if the Gangotri glacier continues to shrink and recede.

A common minimum programme on eco-friendly trips to Gangotri and beyond is sought by the glacier experts. Concerned about

Gangotri water

Continued from page 1 col. 5

the receding Gangotri, Mr Hasnani would like the entire Bhagirathi river valley from Gangotri town to Chaukhamba peak to be declared a protected national park. A ban on dhabas in the protected area as well as on trekking expeditions on the glacier and in the Topoban region for at least 10 years has also been proposed.

Climate change and global warming is affecting snowfall patterns, ice melting and glaciers all over the world. Because the duration of the snowfall has reduced, the peaking is earlier in spring. In Himalayas, particularly around Gangotri, the increased human activity has hastened climate change, says Mr Hasnani.

Mr Hasnani, who recently did a study tour of the Gangotri, says some 70 dhabas have come up at a height of 4,000 metres, 18 kms from Gangotri town. The kerosene stoves used at this height are releasing CO₂ in the rarified air of the mountains, adding to the pollution and pushing up temperatures.

Today the snout of the Gangotri is mainly composed of dead ice, completely detached from the main body of the glacier.

Asian glaciers which are in the middle latitudes are more susceptible to climate change and human activity than the glaciers in the Andes or Alps, says Mr Hasnani. While the glacier has receded plastic bags and tins, left behind by pilgrims and trekkers litter the landscape. Can all this be stopped?

Firms staging backdoor entry

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct. 9

Industries are making their entry into the forest sector through the backdoor in Madhya Pradesh. About 2,500 hectares of forest land with density of less than 40 per cent has been given to the M-P Rajya Van Vikas Nigam Ltd for commercial plantations.

The Nigam in turn has invited tenders from private entrepreneurs for afforestation of these lands on "work contracts" of 30 years which would terminate only at the end of 2026. Some 20-odd forest-based industries have put in their bids. Thus while the Government absolves itself of directly involving private entrepreneurs in forestry, they are making a quiet entry through the forest development corporation.

Ironically the areas to be contracted to private entrepreneurs

are in the largely tribal districts of Chhindwara, Rajnandgaon, Betul and Shivni. It may be recalled that Mr Kamal Nath as Minister for Environment and Forests was hell bent on leasing forest lands to industries and the matter went up to a Committee of Ministers who did not support it.

Now Mr Kamal Nath seems to have sold his idea to his friend, Chief Minister Digvijay Singh and offered his (now his wife's) constituency for the preliminary exercise.

In the August meeting of Forest Ministers in Delhi, Environment and Forest Minister Jai Narain Prasad Nishad had categorically ruled out the leasing of forest lands to industry for commercial exploitation. Even while Mr Nishad is getting kudos for his bold stand which would enable millions of forest dwellers to pursue their livelihood requirements from the forests, Madhya Pradesh Govern-

ment has set its own agenda.

Mr M. F. Ahmed, the Inspector General of Forests, said the State Government had not sought the permission of the Centre for contracting out forest lands. "Non-forest use of forest land is not allowed. It violates the Forest Conservation Act," he admitted.

After receiving information on the tender notices issued by the

ary in Bhopal, however, told this correspondent that the permission of the Centre was not mandatory. Forest lands are not being assigned to private parties. Only the right to grow trees on degraded forest lands is being contracted out, he said. The rights of villagers like nistar rights are being protected, he assured.

Mr Chacko said Madhya Pradesh had 60 lakh ha of degraded forest land and Rs 1000 crore would be needed to regenerate the land. This, he said, the State did not have. Since 1972 he said the State was providing the raw material for forest based industries. But now it could no longer honour this commitment and was asking industry to grow its own requirements. "Unless you stock the forests with tree cover no one will be benefit," he said.

However, Mr Chacko's views

Continued on page 10 col. 8

M-P forest sector

MP, Nigam, he said the Ministry has sought an explanation from the State. Mr Ahmed, who was chief conservator of forests in Orissa before coming to the Centre, recalled that in 1993 the State Government's move to hand over degraded forest land to industries for meeting their requirement of pulp and paper had been struck down by the Centre.

Mr K. T. Chacko, Forest Secret-

national interest.

Commercial exploitation of forest

Continued from page 1 col. 4
are not endorsed by Mr Samar Singh, now secretary-general of the WWF-India but earlier Forest Secretary in M-P and Additional Secretary for Forest Policy in the Environment and Forest Ministry. He said the contract system for working forests was abolished in Madhya Pradesh in the seventies and the National Forest Policy adopted in 1988 stipulates that contracts should not be given. The tender notice inviting private sector into forest operations was a negation of the policy.

Even collection of tendu patta and other minor forest produce by contractors was phased out in the eighties and tribal cooperatives set up for this work. The Forest Corporation efforts in the seventies for commercial plantations in these districts and others with loan from NABARD had failed, Mr Singh said.

"If the wastelands of the Chambals were given for commercial exploitation, the Madhya Pradesh Government could be condoned. But the tribal areas of Chhindwara, Betul, Shivni etc. represent the best forest land of the State," says the former Forest Secretary of the State.

Mr S. R. Hiremath of the National Committee for Protection of Common Land Resources, Mr P. V. Rajagopal of the Gandhi Peace Foundation and Induben of Ekta Parishad have pointed out to Mr Nishad that the "negative impact of the decision of the M-P Government on the tribal communities will be serious enough to create major social problems."

Soz's fight to save forest land

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct. 7

Overruling the advice of his bureaucrats, Environment and Forest Minister Saifuddin Soz has decided to fight all the way to save some 250 hacs of precious forest land which the Gujarat Government has allotted to the Sanghi Cement Company.

Mr Soz's fight is not over who gets the land but the bartering away of protected areas. With India's forest cover getting thinner by the day and large tracts being diverted for mining and other development projects, for Mr Soz saying this 250 hacs of the West Mangrove Reserve Forest of Gujarat has become something of a prestige issue. Though, he has lost the first round to Sanghi Cement and Gujarat Government in the High Court at Ahmedabad, he is still raring to go.

The powerful cement company had earlier succeeded in having a part of the Narayan Sarovar sanctuary denotified for its cement factory. It was subsequently allotted 250 hacs for expansion of its industry — setting up a jetty, a power plant and a desalination facility. Though land was allotted in Gunav village, possession was taken of land in Akri village, some 4 km away.

According to information available with the E&F Ministry this precious land was allotted at 5 paise per sq metre — Rs 1.25 lakh for 250 hacs.

It was the Forest Department in Gujarat which raised the first objections to forest land being allotted, WWF India, which has been fighting denotification of sanctuaries and diversion of forest lands, moved a PIL on allotment of this 250 hacs too.

According to WWF and Environment and Forest Ministry officials there is an updated 1988 Survey of India map, which has been duly accepted by the Gujarat Government, that shows the disputed 250 hacs as forest land.

The case was significant because the Centre seldom disputes the State Government on the status of land — whether forest or revenue land. So the Gujarat Chief Secretary agreed to appoint a committee to transcribe the reserve forest notification on a map.

However, the Chief Secretary would not accede to the Centre's request to include in the committee a representative of the E&F Ministry and the Survey of India.

The committee had all officials of the State. Commissioner for Revenue Inspection, the Chief Conservator of Forests and the Superintendent of Land Records. Even this committee concluded that 127 hacs of the 250 was forest and 95 hacs in Khauther Bet was non-forest land.

The E&F Ministry contested the non-forest status of the 95 hacs in the High Court and pleaded that the master sheets of the Survey of India should be consulted. The court in its interim order has not agreed to the request of the Cen-

tral Government. The Gujarat Committee's report has been accepted in toto.

Sanghi Cement has been allowed to construct on non-CRZ, revenue lands subject to certain conditions. It is expected to put up a power project and a desalination plant to supply potable water free of charge to people of the area and the staff of the company.

As per the court order of June 19 the CRZ notification has been brought down from 500 metres of the high tide line to 100 metres for this stretch of the Gujarat coastline.

The company has also been asked to deposit Rs 50 lakh with the State Government for purpose of compensating damage, if any, to the disputed area and for meeting its obligations.

While the Environment Ministry is still sulking, WWF-India has already filed an appeal against the interim order of the High Court dated June 19, 1997.

At a recent meeting of Principal Chief Conservators of Forests and forest secretaries, Mr Soz had expressed concern about the real forest cover being only 12 per cent of the land area.

Earlier, it was States in the North East that were losing forest cover. The Forest Survey of India for 1995 to 1997 shows that Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh are also losing forest cover. Will Mr Soz take his right to the highest court in the land or will he permit the slow fragmentation of India's forests?

A desert knocks at Delhi's doors

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, May 25

Contrary to popular belief, Delhi is anything but green. Despite Lutyens' gracious Delhi and the green cover of the Central Vista, just 8 per cent of the 1483 sq. kms land mass of the Capital has a green cover.

Dr Iqbal Malik, director of Vatavaran, who did the study on Delhi's green spaces, says 22 per cent of the city has no greenery at all. It is like a desert. While 30 per cent of Delhi has a sparse green cover, 40 per cent has a tree here or there. The study looks at the desertification of the residential-cum-industrial areas.

The Forest Survey of India (1995) shows that 22 lakh saplings were planted in 252 sq kms of the Capital. But Government agencies claim to have planted 30 lakh saplings in 1996 and another 94 lakh

in the two weeks of Van Mahotsav that year.

These figures have been exaggerated by at least 80 times, the Vatavaran report states. The second fact brought out by the report is the absence of trees in the 12,000 acres where legal and illegal industrial units flourish.

Over 60 per cent of the 80,000 industrial units (1990 figure) are in non-conforming areas and 40 per cent of them depend on the toxic waste being dumped in India. Though the Supreme Court ordered the relocation of these industries, it did not order greening of these areas, says Vatavaran. The study laments the absence of a clear cut greening and industrial policy of the Delhi Government. The clean, green Delhi of the fifties has become a dirty, polluted city today.

As the city grew, trees were chopped to establish colonies. Whatever greenery exists is also

being choked to death by polluting industries. Devli village has 20 industrial units which are said to be non-polluting. Massive generators have been installed to ensure round the clock power supply. Apart from the toxic fumes they exude, the noise level in this once sylvan setting is today 90 to 100 decibels. The area is losing its greenery.

Green Park Extension, the report says, has 20 printing press units in rented houses. The printing industry is not considered 'polluting', but the noise levels in the area have resulted in hearing impairment.

In area like Tri Nagar and Vishwas Nagar, 90 per cent of the households have industrial units. There are over 5,000 units in Vishwas Nagar, largely manufacturing PVC cables, copper wiring and aluminium wiring. Anand Nagar and Tri Nagar are also said to be residential areas, but while the for-

mer has a concentration of electroplating units, footwear manufacture is thriving business in the latter.

Listing a dozen residential areas which have turned grey with industrialisation, the report blames Government agencies in Delhi 13,500 acres of barren land.

Besides recommending collective pollution control devices in industrial-cum-residential areas, the report says trees that can absorb the pollution should be planted. Trees are the best dust collectors. The average dust collection ranges from 1.44 to 5.35 grams per square metre of leaf surface.

A peepul with a crown spread of 162 sq. kms releases 1712 kgs of oxygen and absorbs 2,252 kgs of CO₂ per hour. A 500 metre wide green area can reduce the concentration of SO₂ by 70 per cent and NO₂ by 67 per cent.

Monumental pollution-II

Taj is lost in Agra's wild growth as jungle law prevails

by Usha Rai

AGRA, Jan 28
HILE industries are getting the flak for polluting the air

around the Taj Mahal, the Agra Development Authority (ADA) continues its mad pace of construction activity without any concern for development aesthetics or the landscape of the Taj.

How else can one explain the mushrooming of Taj Nagar Partyojana, a colony of ugly concrete residential blocks, barely a kilometre or two from

the world heritage site? In what was Agra's green belt, another housing colony, Shaheed Nagar, is under construction. Each of these colonies with its demands for cooking gas, electricity--which is already in short supply--and water adds to the urban pressure that is threatening the Taj Mahal.

The tonnes of slag or waste generated when the iron scrap is melted in the foundries is dumped at random on roadsides, open grounds and drains. If the multi-coloured plastic bags behind the eastern walls of the Taj Mahal are an eyesore, the

non-biodegradable slag will contaminate the soil and the already highly-polluted water of the Yamuna. Like the ash from the thermal power plants, the slag is everywhere.

Even if there is a ring of truth in industrialist S M Khandelwal's statement that Shah Jahan did not want to build the *maqbara* in wilderness but in the heart of a city so that it could be a living memorial, can this unplanned growth of the city and its environs be permitted?

The Mahurra Refinery, which had sparked off the controversy on the threat of pollution to the

Taj, is planning to expand. A hydro cracker unit has been proposed and production from the refinery is expected to shoot up to 7.5 million tonnes from 6 tonnes a year. In fact, between 1983 and 1994 the population of Agra increased by 87 per cent (15 lakhs), the number of brick kilns by 250 per cent (350) and the sale of petroleum products by 90 per cent (104171 tonnes).

For some years now environmentalists have been assured that the Taj will be protected from dust-storms and particulate matter by a gridle of green plantations. About 10 lakh

trees were to be planted at Mehtab Bagh, now the Taj National Park. The ADA, with the help of the US National Park Service, was given this responsibility. But there is no evidence of any such plantation work. There are only the beginnings of the forest city behind Taj Kheema. The three-year-old plantation on the riverside has dried up and only a few shrubs remain.

When new plantations cannot be maintained, what hope is there for the old? The first-planned garden of the country is said to be Ram Bagh in Agra. It was laid by

Mughal emperor Babur. But there is such a melee of scooters and tempos that it is just not possible to visit the garden or the adjoining tomb of Imdad-ud-daula.

From February 15 all vehicles plying in Agra will be checked for emissions and prosecuted if not within limits. About 20 teams in the city are in charge of the drive. But responsible citizens point out that certificates are already being given without checking the vehicles. This correspondent saw two trucks

Continued on p 9 col 1

■ DEVELOPMENT ■

Assault on nature

Modern man's obsessive drive to amass material wealth through the urban-industrial vision has blinded him to the lethal damage inflicted on the environment, says Usha Rai

NEVER before has there been such an urgent need for a green charter as today. While market economy has enriched our coffers, it has led to the marginalisation of environment and environmental concerns. An array of new cars are available for the upwardly mobile but the air over our cities is becoming increasingly difficult to breathe.

Industries have been mushrooming often at the expense of the rural poor who depend on common lands for survival. The centuries-old culture of conservation has been brushed aside for what is euphemistically called 'sustainable development'. Our land and water too is being polluted with import of pesticides and hazardous wastes; the population is burgeoning and a myriad plant and animal species are on the verge of extinction.

Unfortunately in all the din of the hawala scandal, political parties fighting for their own survival seem to have no time for the green agenda that several groups have prepared for incorporation in election manifestos. The World Wide Fund for Nature, India, the National Committee for Protection of Common Land Resources (NCPCLR) and Vatavaran, a Delhi-based NGO, have all prepared their environment agendas and are knocking on the doors of political parties. Though each group has its own charter and priorities, there is a common concern for nature and poor people running through all three.

The NCPCLR and the Janavikas Andolan have got together 70 environment and social organisations to ensure that tribal and people's rights over forest areas are not brushed aside by industry's demand for degraded forest areas to meet their own requirements of pulpwood and timber. Fortunately with the exit of Mr Kamal Nath from the Ministry of Environment and Forests, this move has died though in Orissa and Arunachal Pradesh some industries have already made a backdoor entry.

Mr S.R. Hiremath of the Samaj Parivartana Samudaya says the organisation is reaching every national and State-level party and assuring them of block votes from the villages where environment organisations exercise influence.

The WWF Green Charter for "development with equity" seeks responsible use of renewable resources, protection of resources that are not renewable and, above all, control on over-consumption of all resources.

There is no hedging of concern caused by overpopulation. The growth of population and spiralling conditions of poverty, along with ever-increasing industrial and commercial pressures on natural resources, are major factors for the worsening environmental crisis, it says.

Dr M.S. Swaminathan, Mr S.P. Godrej and Mr Samar Singh of WWF want political parties to play a more definitive role in ending unsustainable life styles and unacceptable poverty. To give utmost emphasis to protection of basic life-support systems, it has been suggested that the Ministry of Environment and Forests be developed into a Ministry for Ecological Security.

But it is the Vatavaran charter that is most meaty and definitive. Since over-exploitation of underground water has led to the water table dropping to 50 m in UP, Haryana and Bihar, it has suggested harvesting of rain water and renovation of traditional water systems. The old tanks and ponds have now become garbage and industrial waste dumps, says Dr Iqbal Malik of Vatavaran.

It has given political parties two years to make the country garbage-free. Eight per cent of the land mass, it claims, is covered by open garbage dumps. Cleaning up hazardous wastes and hospital waste has been given priority. Instead of disposable syringes which are being recycled and used by drug addicts, Vatavaran makes a strong plea for use of autoclaved syringes and needles.

Currently, small-scale industries are folding up or are being pushed into backwaters where they function without environmental safeguards. Vatavaran has suggested setting up of complexes of small-scale industries with the latest pollution-control devices and process technologies. It is also against accepting toxic wastes from abroad as well as pesticides that are destroying the soil. Thirty per cent of the agricultural land has already been diverted to industry and has been polluted by lead, cadmium and other toxic metals.

Corruption extends to environment too. Expose corruption that is anti-wildlife, anti-environment and anti-conservation, says Iqbal Malik.

The worst form of corruption, she maintains, is the diversion of 1,106 hectares of the Ridge that formed the green lung of the city to Government and semi-Government organisations by the Land and Development Office of the Capital. Is anyone listening?

• DEVELOPMENT •

Lifeline for trees

Women in Tehri Garhwal have launched a Chipko-like movement to protect high-altitude forests, says Usha Rai

A UNIQUE forest conservation movement has been launched in the Ryala region of Tehri Garhwal. In a determined bid to check the felling of green trees at a height of 10,000 feet and above, groups of villagers inspired by the Himalaya Seva Sangh, have been tying the 'raksha sutra' (protective thread) around giant trees that have been marked for the axe.

As in the Chipko movement that has won India international acclaim for its people-inspired forest conservation effort, women are at the vanguard of the *raksha sutra* campaign. "These trees have protected us all these years. Now we will protect them," is the simple logic of the villagers.

The giant trees draped the hills a verdant green, they provided food, fodder and fuel-wood. But above all it was exquisite forest cover that nurtured and sustained the mountain streams and created umpteen 'chaals' or water tanks. There was no shortage of water in these hills.

But, with the vandalism of the forests, the hills are getting bare and even the chaals are drying up or getting blocked with the felled timber.

Ironically enough, last year as well as this year, the *raksha sutra* campaign was around the time of *Raksha Bandhan*, the festival where a girl ties a *rakhi* around the wrist of her brother seeking his protection. While the *raksha sutra* was tied around a 1,000 trees on 200 hectares this year, last year the sacred thread was tied around 2500 trees.

Forests seem to be low priority for the UP government. The handling of the forest fire earlier this year and the lifting of a 10-year moratorium on the felling of trees above a height of 1000 metres in 1993 spell doom for the UP forests and hills. Landslides are already on the rise.

People's movements in difficult hill terrain can only have limited success. But, women walking steep slopes to protect endangered forest chunks by tying *raksha sutras* should inspire the government in Lucknow as well as Delhi to take another look at the forest conservation policy.

The lifting of the moratorium by Uttar Pradesh government, then under Central rule, without consulting the Environment Ministry was condemned by the then Environment Minister, Mr Kamal Nath. The State Government's rationale was that for a more scientific management of forests, the felling of trees above

1,000 metres had been resumed.

In his communication with Mr N Jayal of INTACH and Mr Sunderlal Bahuguna, Mr B.K. Goswami, adviser to the Governor, had said only the 'chir' was being cut. The ban on cutting of other trees, he said, had not been revoked.

However whether the Uttar Pradesh government admits it or not for all practical purposes the ban has been lifted. According to the audio visual presentation prepared by the Himalaya Seva Sangh (HSS), virgin forest areas are now being attacked and trees felled on the pretext that they are 'dry'.

The Ballanga and Bhilang ranges are being systematically denuded to serve commercial interests.

The various checks and balances introduced by the State Government to prevent green trees being felled have been subverted. The forest department is supposed to accompany the forest corporation contractor in the tree marking exercise.

The gram pradhans too are supposed to give their consent. But, the contractors lobby seems to prevail and with the dry trees the green ones are being cut.

People of the exquisite Ryala forest range live in harmony with nature and depend on the forests for their survival. But even here the contractors have cut trees without attracting the attention of the local people.

Last year HSS workers saw 753 green trees marked for cutting. Further one of the cut trees had a marking. Piles of logs, which are smuggled out at night, were also noticed.

Rai, murenda, kharsu, bhooj, mauru and ringal are some of the exquisite trees found in the Ryala forest range. There is a wealth of herbs at this height - atish, kadvi, salang, mishri, chor, chiraita and farad. But the cutting of even a single tree causes incalculable damage by crushing the undergrowth.

After the agitation began, the forest corporation has suspended operations. Five plots in the Tehri region, senior forest staff admitted, were given to the corporation by some juniors.

The people of Ryala are now demanding reimposition of the ban on tree felling above 1000 metres; and that trees marked by the forest department should be cut only after the local people have examined them and that they should have the first right to the dry, uprooted and half broken trees. The demands seem reasonable in an election year.

Keeping Track

WHATEVER happened to the Chipko Andolan? Having cornered a bit of glory and a pocketful of awards including Magsaysay, are the women of Chamoli resting on their laurels?

Chandi Prasad Bhatt, father of the movement, says now that trees have come up on the denuded hills of Chamoli district and fodder is available in their backyard, the women who were at the forefront of the movement are concentrat-

ing on total development of Garhwal. Simultaneously through agro-forestry the revenue generating capacity of villages is being boosted.

Oak trees are being grown at heights where it was once considered impossible and walnut and apricot plantations are adding to family incomes. Eco-protection has increased crop yields. At the vanguard of the development revolution are the women of Chipko.

Bhatt is proud of the magnificent green mantle that cloaks the hills and the availability of fodder today. But he is more ecstatic about the articulation of the women of Gopeshwar — the manner in which they have come out of their shell and are managing water, electricity and their greener environs.

For the last six months in Dashedli, Nagpur and Painkhanda blocks (300 villages) all panchayats and mahila mandals meet at least thrice a month and information is given on government schemes like Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and Indira Awas. Van panchayats and gram panchayats discuss problems — like failure of the piped water supply, electricity or a new disease affecting their carefully cultivated plantations — and then try to resolve them.

Ramesh Pahadi, a former journalist with *Himalaya Times*, has joined the group. He coordinates the development work taking place in the hills and brings out a monthly newsletter that gives information about government schemes, loan facilities and farm research. It is distributed to all mahila mandals, gram and van panchayats.

Myths are being broken continuously. In fields cordoned by stone fencing, crop yields have increased one and a half times. At Papriyan village, 3,000 ft high, 10 to 15 years ago people were adamant that oak would not grow. Today there are thousands of tall oaks. Determined to grow oaks, people went to the forests, picked up saplings and planted them in pits which had been specially dug up.

Earlier the women were guarding the trees from cattle and man. Now, each family contributes Rs 10 and a chowkidar has been hired for the young oak plantations. The

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Chandi Prasad Bhatt has been growing.

With the help of people all over the country, he is expected to develop plans and improve their economic conditions.

Bhatt recalls that Chipko Andolan, which receded so far from the women left home to collect fuelwood and return at night trampling up with a load of 25 kg. But things came

Bahuguna for a policy on Himalayas

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Sept. 20

With 15 months having lapsed since former Prime Minister Deve Gowda appointed two expert committees to review the controversial Tehri dam project, Mr Sunderlal Bahuguna has put up a strong plea for a policy on the Himalayas.

In a memorandum presented to the Parliamentary Standing Committee last week, Mr Bahuguna has said a Himalayan policy would solve the problems relating to Tehri and form the basis of a permanent economy for the region.

"Convert the entire Himalayas into a permanent reservoir by covering all hill slopes with trees that will provide food, fodder and fibre to the people." This would help retain monsoon water and regulate the flow of rivers to be tapped for generating hydro-electricity by run of the river projects without killing the culture of the Himalayas and its rivers.

Mr Bahuguna has given the example of China which is generating 15,000 MWs from 48,000 run of the river projects. After meeting the requirements of local people, the power thus generated could be transmitted from the district grid to the national grid with minimum transmission losses.

Because a vast sum of money has been spent on Tehri dam



already, Mr Bahuguna has suggested that the existing structure be converted into a run of the river project. This would avoid the inevitable risk and disaster and displacement and distress. Those already ousted could be given land for habitation and kitchen gardens near their native villages on the river bank, Mr Bahuguna has suggested.

A strong plea has been made for giving hills their due share of pow-

er and water. In its present form, the Tehri dam would rob the hills of water essential for their survival while transferring it to more prosperous regions. Construction of roads should be minimised because the digging and dynamiting is causing landslides. Instead, Mr Bahuguna has suggested construction of ropeways. The present pattern of development of the hills, he has warned, would only sow seeds of discontent and insurgency.

Mr Bahuguna did not meet the expert committees appointed by the Government because, he says, they were meeting in the Tehri Hydro Development Corporation guest house, a "building which has been the centre of conspiracies, and letting loose oppression against the peaceful people" of Tehri. Ex-MLAs and representatives of peoples' organisations are not invited, Mr Bahuguna has told the Parliamentary Standing Committee. And some of those who venture to the gates of the guest house are whisked off by the police.

"Tehri dam is the first of close to two dozen dams to be constructed in this sector of the Himalayas and we are heading towards catastrophe," says Mr Bahuguna. Since the Himalayas is the water tower of the Indian subcontinent, Mr Bahuguna wants a long term policy to conserve, regulate and augment water supply from the rivers originating from the Himalayas, especially from the Ganga, because it is

the only river which flows through India.

Since the water flow in the Bhagirathi, on which Tehri dam is coming up, is getting less every year, Mr Bahuguna has warned of siltation of the dam. The quantity of water for the dam has been assessed on the rainfall of Raiwala in Doon Valley, where rainfall is the highest, the crusader for the Himalayas has pointed out. The dam is in the missile range of neighbouring countries, he says quoting Maj Gen Bhuvan Chandra Khanduri, ex-MP Ranjit Singh and B. S. Bishnoi.

The unique healing quality of the Ganga would also be eroded when water is impounded in a reservoir, warns Mr Bahuguna. Impounding of monsoon water also obstruct the flushing of polluted rivers downstream and hamper the flow of muddy flood waters brought by Kosi and other rivers.

The impounding of Bhagirathi river waters results in people downstream being deprived of the fertile soil in the flood plains, recharging of underground water is prevented and there is depletion of the fish catch, says the noted environmentalist.

The expert committees on safety and environmental impact appointed by the Government after Mr Bahuguna's long dharna and fast have not yet submitted their report, though they should have been in by September 1996.

'Close the zoos, free the animals'

Animal rights activists are on the warpath. When many creatures are facing extinction and protected areas for wild life are shrinking, prevention of cruelty to animals assumes added significance. **Usha Rai** analyses.

A SPATE of animal deaths in zoos and cruelty to caged creatures, such as putting blades into the mouths of friendly hippos who come with jaws open demanding food, has put animal rights activists on the warpath. "Close the zoos, free the animals," is the slogan they have raised.

But in a country where protected areas for wild animals are shrinking and many creatures are on the verge of extinction, can we not offer them the security of zoos?

In the Jaunpur, Sultanpur, Pratapgarh belt of Uttar Pradesh, wolves that have turned child lifters because their habitat has been destroyed and have no prey to survive on, are being ruthlessly hunted down. Periodically reports come in from all over the country of elephants whose corridors have been encroached on going wild and attacking humans or drowning because they were unable to ford a dammed river.

Zoos exploit wildlife for entertainment. The crores of rupees spent on them could be better utilised for conservation of animals in the wild and the habitat per se, argue those who seek to ban them. It is true that 50 million people visit the zoos every year to commune with nature and to watch the antics of animals. But in the process they are or should be educated about conservation and the linkages between habitat and wildlife protection.

Undoubtedly most of our zoos are in a sorry state and need to be better managed. The Central Zoo Authority (CZA), set up in February 1992, is in the process of weeding out the badly managed zoos. At the time of the country's Independence there were just 22 zoos. By 1973 the number shot up to 43 and by 1991 to over 300.

Currently, 371 zoos have applied to the CZA for recognition. There has been this mushroom growth of zoos because state governments and industries have started treating animals, particularly the chital, as add-ons to picnic spots and gardens without making arrangements for their care.

S. C. Sharma of the CZA says in Uttar Pradesh there are 60 deer parks but there is no proper budget to help feed them. The director of one park goes to the vegetable mandi to collect discarded cabbage leaves for the deer under his care. In the capital's famous Hauz Khas deer park, the 184 chital confined to a small area, have ravaged the park of all edible material. The CZA has asked DDA to move them to Sanjay Van and give the park a chance to rejuvenate.

There are 6,500 chitals in zoos and most of them are in poor health because of tuberculosis. The feeding of animals with leftovers of picnics is also telling on their health. In fact most countries don't want angulets and bears from India because they are infected. Two of the sloth bears sent to Singapore from an Indian zoo three years ago had TB. While one died, the other was put to sleep. But in India, animals rights activists would be up in arms if there is any move to euthanise sick animals.

In zoos which do have vets, doctors as well as

keepers who jump into enclosures to tend to animals have been killed. Just last year, Lucknow zoo's R. C. Das was gored to death by a rhino and in Kanpur a keeper was killed. In the Bombay zoo a visitor who jumped into a rhino enclosure to retrieve his shoe was mauled by the animal.

When the big zoos don't have vets, the plight of the mini zoos or the gardens zoo can be imagined. In Delhi, the Government had issued an order that when deer in Haus Khas Park fell sick they were to be taken to the dispensary in Green Park meant for cattle. Fortunately the order was recalled and now a vet visits the deer park once in 15 days.

In an effort to improve the image of the zoos, the CZA has closed down 35 deer parks and refused recognition for 31 small zoos. The biggest zoo closed so far is of Nasik run by the Municipal Corporation. A major problem that precipitates is finding new homes for animals when a zoo closes down.

Currently, the pressure is on Delhi, Chandigarh, Lucknow and Kanpur zoos to upgrade the staff and improve the management. If this is not done the conditional recognition given will be withdrawn. Delhi zoo has been asked to employ two full time vets, a curator or an officer for animal care and a biological assistant, in addition to improving the drainage and installing a water recycling plant.

And this is despite, Delhi zoo having a whopping budget of Rs 2.5 crore and collects Rs 60 lakh in gate money annually. If it was better managed it could probably earn its keep.

It is a shame that hardly any scientific talent has been employed for recording the scientific data in zoos. Only the Madras zoo has three biological assistants.

However, the pressure put by the CZA and the animal rights activists is forcing many zoos to modernise. Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Calcutta, Surat and Pune zoos are in the process. Animals cooped in cages in zoos on a few acres of land will now be housed in 100 to 200 hac big zoos.

In defence of zoos it needs to be said that a reserve gene pool can be created from which animals can be reintroduced in the wild as and when protected habitats are available. In the mid-seventies when the gharial population was at a critical low, special breeding stations were set up in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and 5,000 gharials released into the Chambal river and a tributary of the Ganges in Uttar Pradesh.

There could be no greater joy than seeing wildlife in its natural setting be it at Corbett, Kanha, Madhumali or Kaziranga. But how many people can enjoy the luxury of such visits? Love for wildlife should be inculcated before children and adults trip into national parks and sanctuaries with their cameras.

Why even Disneyland which had on display mechanised animals is now planning to have its own zoo for it says dummies, however well made, can never substitute the live animal.

Protecting the tiger

by Usha Rai

CAN the tiger be resurrected in Sariska? Theoretically, yes it can be! Sariska is an established tiger habitat. But you need the political will for sanitising the tiger reserve and ensuring that innumerable encroachments — human as well as cattle and thousands of mines around Sariska that add to the pressures on the park — are removed.

Though the Prime Minister has taken interest in ensuring the survival of the king of the jungles — he was even fortunate enough to see a majestic animal in Ranthambhore — the bigger question is: can his interest in the tiger be sustained? Will there be follow-up and action at the field level? Can we strengthen the forest security system?

Can we check poaching? Can the Salman Khans and Pataudis be stopped from killing the fast-depleting prey base of the tiger? Can we manage our parks and forests better? Can we ensure that systems work in this country?

This is not the first tiger crisis. It is the third or fourth. Every time there is a tiger crisis, there is a hue and cry, expert committees are appointed to look into the issue and after a few months it is back to square one. The recommendations gather dust in the Pariyavaran cupboards.

For a decade now the central government has been asking the Rajasthan Government to relocate the 26 villages in the Sariska tiger reserve — four of these villages were even ready to move out. Villagers do disturb the tiger terrain. Living almost at the subsistence level, they are lured and almost compelled to assist poachers.

On the periphery of the tiger reserve are another 300 villages that look enviously at the lush green serenity of the protected reserve. By hook or by crook, they find ways and means of getting in their cattle for a good meal.

Everyone has to be proactive. The frontline forest staff is not trained to deal with poachers moving with guns. Each forest guard is in charge of 15 sq miles of forest area. The area they are supposed to protect has remained the same for decades, but the pressures on the pro-

tected areas have gone up.

Another major problem facing all national parks is the move to give forest lands back to the tribals. The government's Scheduled Tribes and Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill could well finish whatever remains of our wildlife, tigers in particular.

It is all very well to say let people protect their own forests. It may, in fact, be happening in a few isolated pockets like Dahanu in Maharashtra, but we can't save tigers while having tribals in the same space. There would be an overlap of the prey (in this case the tiger and other wildlife) and the predator (man/tribal who has traditionally depended on the forests and wildlife for sustenance).

You must have clearly demarcated tiger reserves and national parks where there will be no intrusion and where

Can Salman Khans and Pataudis be stopped from killing the fast depleting prey base of the tiger?

wildlife, with the tiger at the apex is the first citizen. There should be no mining in these areas, no temples to which hordes of pilgrims are attracted, no poaching and the best possible wildlife and forest management.

There have been several attempts to involve tribal and local communities in forest management and these efforts should continue. But, let us face it, it has not happened.

It is also a fact that forest dwellers hunt, use forest resources for their survival while the Salman Khans and Pataudis and the forest contractors kill/destroy for pleasure and out of greed for some quick green bucks. They are definitely greater criminals than the poor who kill out of a need.

The 1997 pilot eco-development project of Rs 212 crore over five years around seven protected areas had the same goal — to reduce pressures on the forests and wildlife by investing in

development of communities and areas around protected areas.

Income-generating activities, infrastructure development, minor irrigation projects, development of pasture land, improved breed of cows and social forestry was to ease the pressure on forests.

It was a carefully thought-out project to which the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility and the central and state governments contributed. There were delays and hiccups to the project and since the vast amount of money could not be spent in the allotted five years, it got another two years' extension.

The states were to provide additional staff for the eco-development project but they did not. The existing forest staff was shifted out for eco-development work and the core areas had to make do with minimum protection.

The project ended in 2004 and except for Periyar, where eco-development work was successful, in Pench, Gir, Buxa and Palamau and Nagarhole, the results were not commensurate with the vast sums pumped in and in Ranthambhore, the project failed totally. The pressure on all these protected areas continues. There has to be constant vigil.

There were three other committees before the present task force headed by Sunita Narain of the Centre for Science and Environment. All of them made some excellent recommendations.

In 1994, the Subramaniam Committee report on checking of poaching of wildlife and monitoring of trade in wildlife skins and parts made 55 recommendations. Not one of them was implemented though it was discussed at various levels. There was also a report by Mr J J Dutta, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, MP, and another by a committee appointed by the Delhi High Court after a huge haul of skins in 1993.

The recommendations of these committees included training of forest staff, more money, better equipment. It meant an investment of Rs 2,000 crore in the Ninth Plan for checking poaching, better management of wildlife and control of illegal trade in wildlife. Every time the Indian Board for Wildlife met, it sought implementation of the Subramaniam Committee report but in vain.