

Money moon is over

y's New Delhi Television seemed to arshan had to offer. And the national disciplinarian, seemed to never run at is history. Now it's open warfare DD, finds **Usha Rai**

says the hard hitting letter, signed by General Manager K.V.L. Narayan Rao.

An accusation against Prannoy Roy that keeps cropping up periodically is that he was shown undue favour in the once popular *World This Week* programme, aired every Friday. It is said that

he was allowed to dip into DD's footage and walk off with a fortune.

Even the CAG is supposed to have inquired into this. However, in the petition of Rubab Zaidi and others in the Delhi High Court, the then DDG, M.P. Lele stoutly defended Doordarshan's deci-

If ditched by DD, hitch your wagon to the Star

What started with *Chandrakanta* has turned into an exodus from DD

While Prannoy Roy has got the greatest flak for being the old DD team's favourite producer, others who have faced similar charges are Neerja Guleri, the producer of *Chandrakanta*, and Mallika Sarabhai who was doing a talk show.

Guleri's show was in fact moved out from the national channel to DD 2 when it had the highest rating and was raking in money for Doordarshan and the producer. All three were hounded out of DD. On Star TV they will undoubtedly get more money and probably peace of mind but they will lose out on the enormous viewership that Doordarshan has. The other very popular show to move on to Star Plus having got a raw deal on Doordarshan is *Tu Tu Main Main*.

Others who have got put off by Doordarshan's attitude and moved into the open arms of Rati Kant Basu are Priya Tendulkar and the Alva brothers. Living on the Edge won a Green Oscar in London but was literally pushed into living on the edge. It was asked to get sponsors for its programme and found that all business houses wanted to use the programme to get themselves a better image. They wanted to dictate terms to the producers. Since the character and spontaneity of the programme would have suffered with sponsorship, the Alva brothers moved on to commissioned programming on Star TV.

Maneka Gandhi too has moved with her menagerie to Star TV. However, she will be continuing with her *Heads and Tails* on Doordarshan.

Newstrack, the first video news cassette of the country that was doing several programmes for Doordarshan, will now come out with its current affairs programme on Star TV. TV Today's news programme, *Aaj Tak*, will however continue to update Doordarshan viewers with the day's news.



(Clockwise from above) **Chandrakanta, the Alva brothers, Tu Tu Main Main and Newstrack: whether teleserials or current affairs programmes, the march out of DD and into Star Plus continues**

sions on the programme, including its becoming a sponsored programme. Lele testified that the programme had gained immense popularity and it was decided to allow it to continue in the sponsored category after 26 episodes since DD had no funds to commission it.

The Petitioner, Mr Lele said, had twisted facts and informa-

tion to show that DD had shown arbitrariness and favouritism. From the commercial angle, the sponsorship category is much more profitable to DD, the Court was told. "It is also not correct to say the programme is largely an assemblage of old video footage lying with Doordarshan," Lele added. Compared to other programmes telecast in the similar time slot, the *World This Week* was able to earn a substantial amount of commercial revenue, vindicating the decision of DD to change the category of the programme.

It was also pointed out that Prannoy Roy had been presenting the programme himself and his personality and style had got

inextricably linked with the popularity of the programme. Mr Lele said it was Doordarshan's prerogative to continue a programme if it thinks the programme is maintaining its standard and popularity.

Now the same Doordarshan, NDTV feels, is resorting to witch hunting someone who has blossomed on the national broadcaster. It is a volatile situation, where arguably the most high-profile private producer has locked horns with the most powerful broadcaster in the country—national television. The outcome would decide more than how NDTV has been treated, it would go a long way to set standards in television professionalism. ■

They cross borders to fall in poachers' net

Indo-Nepal plan to check transborder poaching

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Jan. 8 Without any hassles, beleaguered Indian elephant herds cut across the international boundaries of Nepal to enjoy the sylvan splendour and protection of Sulkaphanta Wildlife Reserve and Parsa Wildlife Reserve.

The burgeoning rhino population of Nepal — over 500 now — lumber across the border from Chitwan National Park to the Valmiki Tiger Reserve and from Royal Bardia National Park to Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, in Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh.

For elephants, rhinos and other animals these visits across the border like a seasonal holiday are a break from the stifling boredom in their own national terrain. For them it is an opportunity to savour the fruits, shoots and smaller prey of the exotic neighbourhood. But for poachers a migratory animal, outside the sheltered protection of

its homeland, is easy target.

Last week the first trans-boundary consultative meeting between India and Nepal on biodiversity conservation was held in Kathmandu and it was decided to establish trans-boundary protected areas complimentary to each other.

Mr S. C. Dey, Additional I-G for Wildlife, who led the Indian team, said details of extending the protective cover from Sulkaphanta Wildlife Reserve to Pilibhit district, north-east of Corbett National Park; Royal Bardia National Park to Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, 40 km east of Dudhwa; Royal Chitwan National Park and Paras Wildlife Reserve to Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar and Koshi-tappu Wildlife Reserve in Nepal to areas along the Kosi river on the Indian side were discussed.

Singhalila National Park in Darjeeling district is at a height that should normally keep away intruders and poachers but with the red panda and the Himalayan black bear in a plenty it does attract the

human denizens of underworld.

Wildlife conservationists on both sides are concerned because poachers and timber smugglers cause death and destruction and seek protection across the border. At the Kathmandu meeting, 11 routes of illegal trade as well as the season of trade have been identified and it has been decided to set up special anti-poaching-cum-smuggling units.

Nepal's national parks and wildlife service has powers to fine up to Rs 1 lakh and put behind bars for 15 years poachers or smugglers. So operations are clandestine and the hideout is invariably across the border. In India, however, poachers and smugglers get away even after being caught red-handed.

Nepal's long vigil, however, seems to have paid dividend. It is the only country in the world where the tiger population has gone up and is today about 200. The rhino population which was 60 some 40 years ago has risen to a respectable 500. In India too the

rhino population is a stable 1,500 but we have not been able to check the poaching, admits Mr Dey.

But despite all the powers of the Nepal park directors, Kathmandu continues to be the gateway for smuggled animal and plant parts to China and the other countries. About a dozen items of trans-border illegal trade have been identified. These include medicinal plants, furs, skins, bear bile (used as medicine), musk, tiger bones, rhino horns, butterflies, snake skins, swiftlet nests (eggs used in a soup delicacy) and agarwood.

Though Nepal has got its act together for controlling smuggling of animal parts and skins and even live animals and birds, it is seeking India's help in identification and control of illegal trade in medicinal plants.

While India and Nepal are forging links for conservation of species and ecosystems, they have appealed to the international communities to abandon use of illegally obtained timber, wild flora and fauna and their products.

\$ 1.4 m allocated for tiger conservation

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Jan. 29

An important fallout of the controversy that has built up around tiger conservation work in India and the role of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is allocation of a whopping \$1.4 million for tiger conservation work in India over the next three years. This includes \$50,000 from WWF-I's 1994 allocation that had not been utilised.

There has been a flurry of activity in the WWF office here over the last couple of days as the big-wigs of conservation from Geneva and London joined the Indian Board of trustees to see how best to resolve the tiger crisis.

A special tiger cell is being set up, initially headed by Tom Mathew, in the WWF office. The steering committee for the tiger cell will include representatives of WWF-I, representatives of donor countries and trustees of WWF-India.

Dr Claude Martin, Director-General of WWF-International, who knows the Indian jungles and was in Kanha, Madhya Pradesh in the early 70s doing research on the barasingha, admits quite frankly that no single NGO can save the tiger.

The involvement of Government, forest guards and directors



of Tiger Reserves is vital for tiger conservation in a country where populations are scattered, forests are getting thinner and human pressure on forest land increasing.

The steam went out of Project Tiger and poaching increased phenomenally in the early 90s, says Dr Martin. Since WWF cannot substitute for the Government, top priority is being given to activate the Government for tiger conservation. How to rekindle political will for protection of the king of the jungles will be the major challenge for WWF.

With additional resources, WWF hopes to zero in on two Ti-

ger Reserves initially. With the support of the local Governments and forest authorities, working plans will be drawn up.

Since WWF does not support use of guns, this is one piece of equipment that will not come from the international agency. Nor will uniforms for forest guards. But WWF is willing to provide jeeps, wireless sets and more sophisticated equipment to check the poaching activity.

It will also work with local communities in development to ease the pressure on the tiger reserves. Since the World Bank is already investing \$10 million in eco-development around national

parks, WWF would not like to duplicate their efforts.

Dr Martin steers clear of the controversy on the number of tigers being killed — one a day or 500 in a year. India has a vibrant population of tigers and a certain number die naturally. Poaching has added to the death toll. But how this will effect the reproductive capacity of the tiger population has to be scientifically analysed, he maintains.

Having saved the Panda in China — about 1,000 left in the wild — Dr Martin is confident that the tiger will also survive the dooms day predictions. Since most of the tiger killings are reported outside the Tiger Reserves, talks have begun in the Government on linking the protected areas through forest corridors. Because of the tremendous pressure on land, we have to talk of conservation per se and not just the tiger, says Dr Martin.

One of the 25 foreign experts advising the Chinese Government on conservation, Dr Martin says pressure is being put on China too for tiger conservation. The Chinese Government is looking for a new image and for a year now trade in tiger bones has been banned. A lot of money has been put into tiger conservation in China too by the WWF-I. Currently, it is supporting a programme for training and information on Chinese medicines.

Humble earthworms' mighty miracles

Crop yield up by 30 to 200 pc

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, March 7
Humble earthworms are working miracles in restoring degraded soils in the tea gardens of the Nilgiris, rice plantations and agro forestry. With the now much sought-after earthworm technology, crop yields have increased 30 to 200 per cent.

The Indian and French scientists who have collaborated in the technology that could revolutionise agricultural production have registered their international patent, titled 'Fertilisation Bio-organique Dans les plantations de the' in Sri Lanka through the Ministry of Agriculture, France, just last year.

Dr B. K. Senapathi of the School of Life Sciences, Sambalpur University, Orissa, who has been working on vermiculture on earthworm technology since 1975 says composting earthworms account for just 3 to 5 per cent of the earthworms. The rest of the earthworms play a vital role in soil fertility. But so far, scientists had not bothered about these other parameters of the earthworms.

It was in trying to understand the synergetic role of all beneficial soil organisms that Dr Senapathi and his French counterpart, Dr P. Lavelle of ORSTOM, University of Paris, struck gold. Today the technology is being used on some 200 hac. All the experimental blocks are on farmlands, most of them at least a hac each, and are maintained by the host company staff in keeping with the plans drawn up by the associated scientists.

The patent fee has been fixed at Rs 3.5 lakh. But it is possible to get concessions, says Dr Senapathi. If the Indian scientist is gung-ho about his research, it is with good reason. "This is the first earthworm technology at the international level relating to restoration of degraded soils in man-managed systems. What is

more it has been developed and implemented in India with the collaboration of developing and developed countries."

The research was funded by Parry Agro Industries Ltd., which is also a partner for patent rights, and the European Economic Community. The patent deals with: 1) bio-fertilisation units; 2) methods comprising use of fertiliser and organic matter — quality, quantity and placement and, 3) large-scale earthworm culture of selected species and their use in different plantation crops and agro-forestry.

Prof. P. S. Ramakrishnan of Jawaharlal Nehru University's School of Environmental Sciences, who has been supporting the work of Dr Senapathi, says that the use of earthworms brought down the use of fertilisers by 30 per cent in some cases. The technology was first applied in the tea gardens of the Western Ghats where extensive use of fertilisers had made gardens unsustainable. Earthworms integrated into organic residues were like capsules releasing nutrients in small doses so that the crop utilised it better.

The salient feature of the new technology is the importance given to soil fertility — its physico-chemical and biological component.

In the tea plantations there was a 50 to 70 per cent deterioration of the soil due to intensive cultivation. While the indirect in-soil earthworm technology implementation had enhanced production by 20 to 40 per cent, direct in-soil technology had increased yields by 90 to 260 per cent in comparison with conventionally managed blocks.

Dr Senapathi maintains that large-scale earthworm culture has revealed the suitability of producing the desired varieties in a span of just three months and this is cheaper than other methods of procurement.

Research fellow working on the project have been employed as regular staff of the company and are in charge of the newly-created vermiculture technology division.

Details of technology transfer comprise three stages — purchase of FBO patent; experiment in the user's field and analyses by scientists and consultants; sharing of profit and credit incurred through enhanced production and improving the existing technology (if required) and land restoration.

Extend sathin scheme, NCW tells Govt

From Usha Rai

JAIPUR, April 5

The key functionaries of the country's most talked about model of women's development, the *sathins* of Rajasthan, find that their growth has been stymied even as they preach grandiose dreams of women's empowerment.

Though the State seems to have lost faith in its grass root workers and has categorically stated it will not extend their model to the whole State, the National Commission for Women has recommended to the Centre that the *sathin* scheme be extended to the whole country on the lines of the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services).

On Thursday, as 600 *sathins* braved the rains and sat on dharna at Badi Choupat to demand a respectable stipend, Jnanpith award winner Mahashweta Devi, retired judge Rajinder Sachar, Ms Promila Dandavate of the Mahila Dakshita Samiti and Ms Padma Seth of

the NCW, among others, rallied around them expressing solidarity.

Mr Rajinder Sachar, who works with the People's Union for Civil Liberties, as well as Ms Mahashweta Devi — who has seen acute poverty among tribals — were shocked that the *sathins'* stipend had stayed almost static from 1984 when the scheme was started.

As Ms Aruna Roy, a former IAS officer associated with WDP and the training programme of the *sathins* and now with the Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan, pointed out, the *sathins* were given Rs 200 a month because the minimum wage then was about Rs 7 a day. Today the minimum wage in the State is Rs 32, which means about Rs 900 a month, but the "honorarium" of the *sathins* has got stuck at Rs 250 a month. The meagre amount is seen as remuneration for work that is supposed to be voluntary.

This was the second dharna organised by the *Sathin* Karmachari Sangh which feels that it cannot now step back without fighting for the rights of empowered *sathins*. Newly elected

women *sarpanches*, some men who were actually pleased to see their women getting articulate and mobile and even a representative of the Mahila Samooh, seen as the alternative to the *sathin* model, assured the *sathins* that "this is not your fight alone but the fight of all women that the State seeks to suppress with low wages." "It is a fight for women's emancipation," they said.

Though the original threat to wind up the scheme has receded, neither Chief Minister B. S. Shekhawat nor Chief Secretary M. L. Mehta was willing to announce the increase in honorarium. However, Mr Mehta did admit to a delegation led by Ms Padma Seth that the honorarium was inadequate and would be raised.

About a dozen people including Ms Mahashweta Devi and Mr Sachar met Mr Shekhawat and pointed out the injustice of the low honorarium. Ms Mahashweta Devi said there should be at least one *sathin* in each of the 38,000 villages of the State to ensure empowerment of women and they

should get the minimum wages.

Mr Shekhawat who initially maintained that the *sathins* had failed to bring about a change in the villages and that the commissions were not doing very much, then came round to admitting that the State was going through a financial crisis and an enhanced honorarium could not be considered till May. The NCW, which was asked by Mr Shekhawat to study the *sathin* scheme, had recommended consolidation of the existing scheme.

Mr Mehta, who insisted that the *sathins* were not doing any specific jobs, was willing to issue an order to withdraw these responsibilities if the government order could be shown to him. However, Ms Arti Sahni said the *sathins* had been assigned 68 jobs that varied from getting women land rights to preparing compost and distributing condoms and contraceptive pills.

As Ms Aruna Roy and some other activists pointed out, the bureaucracy in the State feels threatened when there is any mobilisation of people.

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Panel wants tree-felling ban in the North-East to continue

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, June 30
With 2,82,397 trees valued at Rs 1,977 crore being officially cut in the North East annually and the large scale transportation of logs out of the region, the Supreme Court-appointed T.V. Rajeswar Committee has recommended the continuation of the ban on tree-felling in the North East till a full and proper review is undertaken.

The Committee, appointed to prepare an inventory of timber and timber products of the North East, has pointed out that such sustained felling over the years (dating back to the eighties) could lead to a serious environmental and ecological imbalance in the region with far reaching consequences for the nation.

In December last year the Supreme Court had directed that the Forest Conservation Act 1980 be applied to all forests irrespective of ownership or classification. It banned the felling of trees, ordered the closure of saw/veneers mills running without the approval of the Central Government and stopped the movement of timber from the seven North Eastern States.

The Rajeswar Committee has reported that at present the total number of saw mills in the North East region is 1,228, saw-cum-veneers mills, 291 and plywood factories, 77. These factories are annually allotted a quota of 1.4 lakh cubic feet per year which is sufficient to operate the saw-cum-

veneers mills for about six months and the plywood factories for about four months. Since these factories are never idle, the Rajeswar Committee estimates that their actual consumption is over 900 times the officially allotted quota — a little over 988 lakh cft of timber per year.

"It is apparent that the forest wealth of the North Eastern States is being systematically squandered away," the report says. While the committee has valued the timber extraction at Rs 1,977 crore — at Rs 200 per cubic feet, the earning of the seven States as per the official figures for 1995-96 is just Rs 79.25 crore (Arunachal — Rs 49.50 crore, Assam — Rs. 17.27 crore, Meghalaya Rs 2.25 crore, Nagaland Rs 2.75 crore, Manipur Rs. 2.23 crore, Mizoram Rs 1.61 crore and Tripura Rs 3.04 crore).

The State's working plans for the management of the forests, which includes felling of trees, supply of timber quota to factories etc., have become irrelevant. The working plans in vogue do not reflect ground realities, the Rajeswar Committee has pointed out. It has suggested a complete survey of the reserved forests of the North East by the Forest Survey of India along with NGOs concerned with environmental problems and State officials. Based on the new survey in the next two to three years, the revised working plans can be prepared with the approval of the Centre.

The Committee has asked for three months to prepare an inven-

tory of the trees in the forest. It believes that the collection and transportation of timber is being deliberately delayed awaiting a relaxation of the ban by the Supreme Court. Though the inventory of the timber lying in factories is being prepared, the Committee found it difficult to assess the quantity since many of the logs were heaped together and it was difficult to get fork-lifts to lift them.

The committee has also forcefully argued against the reopening of the wood-based industries till the inventory of felled trees is complete. If they are reopened, the process of the denudation of forests will start all over again, it has warned.

The question of authorising the factories, the Committee points out, should depend on the capacity of the forests to feed them as per the revised working plans. The committee says the factories should remain closed until a further review is conducted.

It has also been suggested that the wood-based industries be shifted from the forests (where they are in violation of the Forest Conservation Act) to designated industrial estates. The 128 wood-based factories in the 100 km stretch from the border of Tirap and Chanlang to Assam, which the committee has described as a "permanent drain on the forests of the North East and the ecological system of the country", should be moved out of the North East region.

Scientists will help draft Biodiversity Bill

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Aug. 14

A team of scientists, headed by Dr M. S. Swaminathan, will help the Environment and Forest Ministry to draft what is probably the first Bill anywhere in the world on biodiversity.

The Biodiversity Convention

that India signed at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 states categorically the sovereign rights of nations to their biological resources. Though other countries may have access to these resources, the host country should benefit from research programmes and the commercial use of the plants and wild species in its domain.

But the detailing of governance

of these resources and access to them is so difficult that Environment and Forest Minister, Saifuddin Soz has decided to seek the help of the best scientific brains in the country.

Prof Soz said India had been listed as one of the 12 megadiversity regions of the world. Scientists have already catalogued 49,000 plants, which accounts for 7 per cent of the world's flora and 81,000 animal species. But the updating of the enormous biodiversity of the country is a continuing process.

With tumeric and neem being patented abroad and plant species like taxus baccata used in treatment of cancer being surreptitiously exported, the need for a legislation on the country's biodiversity has acquired urgency. Thirty botanical institutes, on the basis of three workshops, have compiled a list of 214 medicinal plants...

Forty-nine of them have been listed as critically important and 43 as endangered.

Other members of the expert team include Mr T. N. Khoshoo, former Environment and Forest secretary currently working with the Tata Energy Research Institute; Dr R. S. Piroda, D-G ICAR;

Dr Manju Sharma, secretary, department of biotechnology; Prof Madhav Gadgil, Indian Institute of Science; Dr A. E. Muthunayagam, secretary-department of ocean development; Dr D. N. Bortha Thakur of Guwahati University and Dr Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign.

Rape robs her of motherhood forever

From Usha Rai

SAHARANPUR, Sept. 18
Naina (not her real name) is just seven years old. The youngest child of a Muslim family, teetering on the verge of starvation in Jandhera village, Rampur. She is frail and has large luminous eyes which are ever so often shadowed by a terrible fear.

This April, her wonderful, carefree world in sugarcane and wheat fields was shattered. It was the harvesting season and her mother, who had found employment as a daily wager worker, asked her to run home and get her some *roti* and water. As the little girl skipped along the wheat fields, a 20-year-old truck driver, Raja, a Dalit from the same village, caught her and raped her.

When she regained consciousness, she hurried home blood streaming down her legs. She was taken to a doctor who informed her parents that their little girl had been raped.

Naina's mother, accompanied by two policemen, took the traumatised girl to a hospital in Meerut. Her tiny uterus had been so badly ruptured that to save her life, the doctors removed it. Little Naina has to undergo another surgery of her private parts. But Naina will never conceive and to the village the little girl is already "*baan*" (barren).

A relative of Naina, Ali Sher, brought the case to the notice of a

women's organisation — Disha. When they visited her, Naina was suffering from high blood pressure and had puss in her urinary tract. She was rushed to the civil hospital in Saharanpur and was there till May 12.

Fortunately, Naina was able to name the rapist and he was arrested. But he is out on bail and has been boasting that in a state where the Dalits reign supreme no one can touch him. He has even gone to the extent of taunting Naina's mother *yeh tho ber hai jo mai kachcha kha sakta hun ya pakne ke badh* (She is like the *ber* fruit that can be eaten when it is raw or when it has ripened.)

The National Commission for Women, which intervened in the case, had said that no bail should be given to Raja. The district magistrate had assured that a home would be given to Naina's homeless family. But the assurance has remained on paper and Raja is roaming like a free bird.

The village has not had the spunk to beat up the rapist or throw him out of the village. But the women's groups have rallied around the little girl. The new SSP, Mr Meena, who has taken charge just a month ago has assured that he will book Raja again.

In 1993 a five-year-old girl was raped in Pehalwan village by a shop-owner and his servant. A case of rape and attempted murder was registered. But the mother was so traumatised by the incident

that she became insane and the father committed suicide. The little girl, who was the butt of cruel jokes and taunts in the village, was moved to an ashram in Jaipur.

Two school teachers Chandan Singh (57) and Megh Singh (52) who were suspended and arrested for rape/molestation of three school girls of 12 and 13 years of Subrimehrab, in May have been released on bail by the sessions court which maintains that the medical records do not show rape.

The two teachers had taken the three school girls and one Gulab Singh to do the primary school exam at Kota on April 30. They stayed over night in the primary school building so that they could take the examinations the next morning. But that night the teachers are believed to have given each child five tablets which they said were for their digestion. Gulab Singh did not have a single tablet but the other had two or three. They said they fell asleep soon after. One of the girls recalls a teacher trying to hug her. The only witness to what happened that night was young Gulab Singh.

The next morning all three girls were naked, Gulab Singh has testified. Two of the girls were unconscious and one was bleeding. They were rushed by the teachers to a registered medical practitioner, the husband of an *anganwadi* worker Babita. It was the doctor who sent for the girls' parents and Babita washed the

blood stained clothes of one of the girls and gave her a set of fresh clothes.

The villagers beat up the teachers and rushed their children to the hospital in Saharanpur. After the intervention of the NCW, the teachers were arrested under the National Security Act and suspended.

The circle officer of Deoband, who handled the case, expressed the surprise at their release on bail. Of the 40 cases that were brought to the notice of the NSA Board, it was the worst, the officer recalled. Even if there was no evidence of rape surely the mere molestation of school girls was a serious enough charge.

When this correspondent visited Saharanpur with representatives of the NCW, a huge crowd from Subrimehrab village pleaded for justice. The teachers have been claiming they are "*damads*" (sons-in-law) of the village." The teachers, they said were putting tremendous pressure on the parents to take back the cases and were even registering false complaints against them.

"Our girls have stopped going to school. Their chances of a marriage have been blighted," they wailed. All these girls will have to become 'Phoolans' (dacoits) and seek revenge. They have no other choice if the state continues to be indifferent, the parents warned.

(To be continued)

Dams

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World panel to assess large da

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct. 9

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and the World Bank have set up the first ever World Commission on Dams for an independent review of the costs and benefits of large dam projects.

South Africa's Water Minister, Prof. Kader Asmal, will chair the new commission to be formally launched next month. The Narmada Bachao Andolan, the International Rivers Network, USA, and the Berne Declaration have said they will work to ensure the selection of other members of the commission who will reflect the knowledge and experience of dam affected people, dam struggles and NGOs.

The commission, if truly independent and comprised eminent persons of integrity, has the potential to evaluate the true costs and

benefits of dam projects and to restrict construction of destructive dams world-wide, representatives of the three internationally recognised NGOs have stated. The commission's ability to deliver will depend as much on its eight members, whose names have not yet been announced, as on its chairman.

The announcement from Washington on the setting up of the commission comes just as Sunderlal Bahuguna has begun what he calls a prayerful fast to highlight the obstinacy of the authorities in going ahead with the Tehri Dam Project in its present form. Mr Bahuguna has sought to clarify that his fast is not a hunger strike but a non-violent means to awaken the sleeping, ethical powers of the nation.

On June 25 last year, the then Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda had promised an independent review of the problems connected with the dam in three months. The

report is still await

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Thangakabalu remain TN chief: Dhaw

CHENNAI, Oct. 9

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By Usha Rai

Wildlife hot spots come up as industrial growth turns wayward

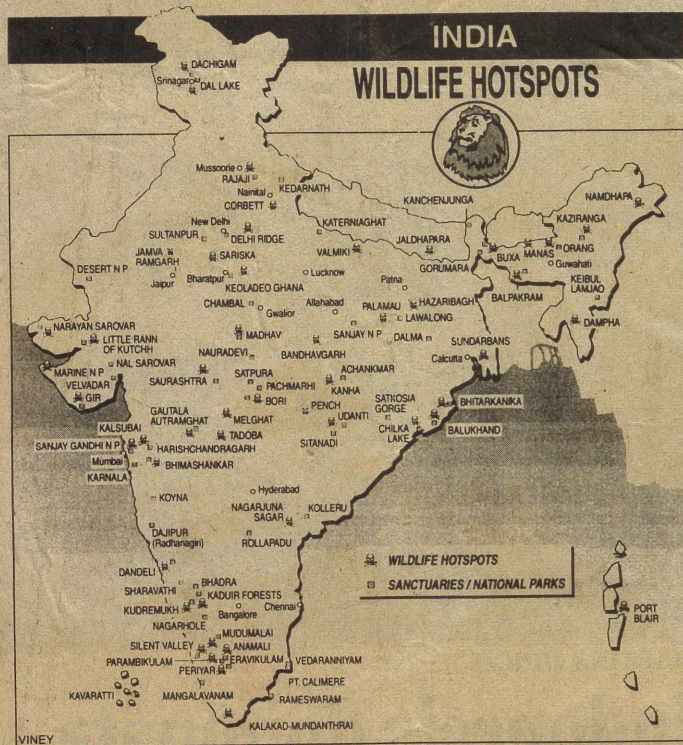
NEW DELHI, Oct. 12
 Though a lot of hue and cry has been raised over the threats to Indian wildlife from poaching, the more insidious threats that could dismember the contiguous forest belts and protected areas — home to wildlife — are from industrial and commercial projects, says Bitu Sahgal, member of the Indian Board for Wildlife and the Steering Committee of Project Tiger.

Sahgal has brought out a map of the 50 wildlife hot spots in this 50th year of India's Independence. Sanctuaries and national parks are the best water catchment areas. The water security of the subcontinent will be at risk if these areas are degraded or lost, he warns. A copy of the map was presented to Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral at the start of the Wildlife Week earlier this month.

What is worse, India's network of parks and sanctuaries is being dismembered by government design and sanction, almost invariably for short-term gains. India's endangered wildlife species might become extinct because of the rapacity of developers, than the avarice of poachers, says Sahgal.

Mines, dams, canals, polluting industries, new highways, thermal plant and urban constructions including tourism projects, townships and resettlement sites are coming up in protected areas with the tacit approval of the government, he says.

In addition to these disturbances, "there is any orgy of timber industries that continue their activities overtly or covertly in viola-



tion of the Supreme Court orders to the contrary." Due to lack of vigilance and enforcement at the state level in Madhya Pradesh, for example, half of the 10,000 saw mills in operation are illegal. In Tripura too unlicensed saw mills

continue to operate.

At the meeting of the Indian Board for Wildlife in July a letter detailing the 50 Indian tragedies in the making was handed over to the Prime Minister. Ironically, all commercial use of forests is

categorised by planners as 'development.' Protecting natural India should be the target development, says Sahgal in his letter to the PM.

Sahgal documents the threats to India's wildlife and forests — from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the Sunderbans in West Bengal, Namdapha Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh and the new threats to the Silent Valley in Kerala.

The Kerala Government, he says, has allowed valleys, contiguous to the Silent Valley, to be deforested and there is even talk of reviving the old hydroelectric project.

In Madhya Pradesh white sandstone mining has affected the Panna Tiger Reserve. Since this project has come up in violation of the Forest Conservation Act, it clearly shows a lack of will in the M-P government to oppose destructive commercial projects. The director of Project Tiger, Mr P. K. Sen, has pointed out that in the nearby Gangau sanctuary, diamond mining is encroaching on forest land. The park is choked with slurry and polluted water.

The wild ass sanctuary in the Rann of Kutch is now threatened with shrimp ponds, chemical factories and a proposal to construct a network of canals as part of the Narmada Project.

Poison takes a heavy toll on tiger population

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 16

While the poisoning of two tigers (not three as claimed in sections of the Press) in the buffer zone of Corbett National Park has sent shock waves across the country, a fairly closely guarded secret is the large number of tigers that are being poisoned both inside the tiger reserves and outside.

At the steering committee meeting of Project Tiger in August, the chief wild life warden of Andhra Pradesh, Mr Ramakrishnan, reported 16 cases of tiger poisoning in the Srisailem Tiger Reserve over the last two years. Since then the number of poisoned tigers in this state alone has shot up to 20, says Mr P. K. Sen, director, Project Tiger.

All cases of poisoning in Andhra are by villagers whose cattle have been lifted by tigers. Incited by the Naxalites, who operate in this area, they have poisoned the tigers by putting pesticides and poison in the kill.

According to Mr Valmik Thapar, another member of the steering committee of Project Tiger, who has been fighting hard to save the tiger, about two weeks ago at Bhadra sanctuary, Karnataka, a big cat ate something and just exploded. Mr Thapar said 6 tiger carcasses had also been recovered from Pakhal Tiger Reserve, Oris-

sa. At Tadoba Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra a dead tiger was picked up with a bullet wound. In Madhav National Park, there are reports of 5 tigers being killed.

Mr Sen could not confirm these deaths but said that the chief wildlife wardens have admitted to large scale killing of tiger outside the protected areas. UP's chief wildlife warden informed the steering committee that 80 tigers had been killed outside national parks; Maharashtra reported 15 per cent loss of tigers in the state in a year and Rajasthan reported 8 tiger deaths.

Whether it is by poisoning or some other method, the grim reality is that slowly but surely the tiger is being decimated. Though the 1997 May/June tiger census report has not yet been submitted by the states, estimates of the tiger population in the country vary from steering committee member S. Deb Roy's 2300 to Mr Sen's 3000. Fifty per cent of the tigers are said to be outside the tiger reserves.

Mr Sen said a new technique, using steel wire nooses, was being adopted for killing tigers in the Sunderbans. A steel wire is stretched to death as it tries and a tiger caught in the noose strangles to death as it tries to extricate itself. Mr Sen reported two tiger deaths in the Sunderbans through this crude and cruel method, earlier used for trapping deer.

Tigers may have died of virus

Senior scientist and veterinary doctor attached to the Wild Life Institute, Dehra Dun, Dr Malik, apprehends that the Corbett tigers may have died of the same feline virus that killed five tigers in the Safari Park outside Bhopal and in Sariska National Park, Rajasthan last year.

Samples of the viscera of the dead tigers were sent to him as well as to the Forensic Laboratory, Agra. Dr Malik, however, has not been able to confirm the viral attack. But he has suggested controlled burning of the area where the carcasses were found and aerial spraying.

In Madhya Pradesh medicines had to be imported and the tigers in the Safari Park vaccinated after being tranquilised. But in the wild this kind of a vaccination drive of tigers may just not be possible.

As forest covers are thinning and villages on the fringes of tiger reserves getting more populated, tigers are killing cattle, which may be easier to pick up than their natural prey.

According to Mr Brijender

Singh, honorary wildlife warden of Corbett National Park and member of the Indian Board for Wild Life, there are 170 villages around Corbett National Park and villages in the buffer zone have grazing rights and right to fuel wood and fodder.

The two dead tigers were found



within one-and-a-half km of each other on Dec. 5 and 9. The first one was found opposite village Jammaon in the Jameria block of Mandaal forest range. The tigress and the grown-up cub were in the buffer zone of Kalaghar forest division. According to Mr Sen the tigress and the cub had probably shared a kill. The search for the kill, however, was unsuccessful.

While the field director of Corbett, Mr Gautam, has reported

that a cow and calf were lifted in the area of the killing on Nov. 15, according to other sources 15 to 20 cattle have been picked up in the area in the last two months and the villagers were extremely disturbed. In fact the park authorities had been warned by the intelligence units that there was a distinct possibility of the tigers being poisoned.

The fact that no part of the dead tigers was removed has ruled out the involvement of poachers in the killing. "It is likely to be a case of angry villagers retaliating to lifting of cattle," says Mr Sen. Tiger poisoning has been reported from all over the country from time to time.

Government compensation for cattle lifting varies from Rs 200 to 20,000 depending on the size of cattle. Inconvenienced, angry villagers often decide to exterminate the pest. The fact that compensation does not reach them for six to eight months only adds to the problem. Though the purely private Corbett Foundation has also been compensating for cattle lifted, it has not been easy to win over the villagers.

Caught between the avaricious poachers and the angry villagers in a shrinking habitat, dooms day is round the corner for the tiger. Village panchayats round National Parks have to be wooed by the forestors if the tiger is to survive.

■ Involvement

This is the story of a man and his group of nature lovers who created a movement and probably the country's only wildlife sanctuary completely protected by the villagers themselves. USHA RAI in the North-East.

Nature lovers, a village, their very own wildlife sanctuary

At a time when protected areas of the country, be they national parks or tiger reserves, are under severe threat, in Assam a group of young nature lovers have succeeded in motivating and educating the local people to rally around the protection of 11,206 acres of neglected forests.

In July 1994, at the request of the villagers people and a group of nature lovers, called 'Nature's Beckon' the once thinning forest of Chakashila Hill Reserve of Dhubri district, was notified as Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary.

Soumyadeep Datta, 27, the director of Nature's Beckon and the man who created the movement for probably the country's only wildlife sanctuary which is completely protected by the local community, says it was the discovery of the Golden Langur (*presbytis Geei*) in the Chakrashila reserve forests that triggered off the forest conservation movement. Was the Golden Langur and the exquisite biodiversity of the region doomed to extinction with the forests? Soumya was then only a school boy and an avid bird watcher associated with a World Wildlife Fund Nature Club.

Today the sanctuary is guarded round the clock by the villagers. Not a single forest department personnel has been posted at Chakrashila. There is neither a range office or a beat office in this sanctuary.

Chakrashila has several poor villages on its periphery inhabited by Rava and Bodo tribes. Soumya says these indigent villagers saw their forests being ravaged by affluent timber merchants but they had neither the confidence nor the unity to retaliate. In the eighties, members of Nature's Beckon realised that conservation of Chakrashila was next to impossible unless the villagers themselves stopped these exploiters of their forest resources.

With the assistance of Longthu Rava of Jonnagra who they knew from childhood, members of Na-

ture's Beckon, enrolled the village youth as their members. Each member was given the organisation's badge and identity card. As the villagers' confidence in the nature lovers grew, they began sitting with them in the evenings — discussing environment and the interdependence of plants and animals.

Soon the local community realised that no one could save their once virgin forests unless they took responsibility. But fighting the influential timber merchants and poachers was not easy. It took a whole year to get the total support of the villagers of Jonnagra and stop the entry of smugglers.

In November when harvesting was over, when villagers were relaxed and there was food in their larders, direct action against the poachers and smugglers was launched. There were clashes and some of the boys were injured but no complaints were lodged with the police so that villagers did not become dependent on the police and forest department. The timber mafia also could not complain to



The discovery of the Golden Langur in the Chakrashila reserve forests triggered off the conservation movement

the police. When the smugglers were driven out axes, choppers, saws, ropes and once even some ammunition they left behind were handed over to the forest department.

Soon letters of commendation from the higher-ups in the forest department began trickling in.

The group then turned to economic upliftment of the villages — organising them to manage and develop the forest resources. They were encouraged to sell minor forest produce like thatch for huts, bamboo, grass, as well as cultivate traditional foods like edible roots, tapioca, wild flowers and raise edible insects. Kitchen gardens were developed and poultry and piggery helped them get a little extra money. Traditional skills in weaving too were encouraged.

Jonnagra's success story brought the adjoining villages of Abhyakuti, Bandarpara, Kaljani, Damodarpur into the development network. Nature's Beckon set up its central office, called

Tapoban for interaction among villagers. Its popular slogan, heard even today, is "bring the forests to your village".

In Jonnagra village crop production is doubled by connecting the cultivatable land to a perennial spring called Mauria Jhora.

Today there is an excellent checklist of the wildlife and biodiversity of the region. Clean and spruced up village huts with toilet facilities serve as tourist huts and give villagers additional income. Two villagers accompany picnic parties into the sanctuary and ensure that it is not littered. Each party has to pay Rs 60 to Rs 70 to the tourist guides-cum-cleanliness campaigners.

By getting Chakrashila upgraded to a wildlife sanctuary, the local community has ensured that greedy politicians do not cast covetous eyes on their emerald gold while Soumya and his team have put Chakrashila on the world conservation map.

■ Concern

Joint effort: Villagers and forest officials manage a forest

On their own the forest departments have always found it difficult to guard forests from the timber mafia. By giving villagers around the area a 'vested interest' in protecting the forests, a meaningful involvement takes root...

A HUNDRED hectares of thick jungle in the middle of a totally denuded forest in Melaghar, Sonampura subdivision of west Tripura, just 50-km from Agartala, today bear testimony to how a people's movement for managing forests can drastically change the forest cover in the country.

This marvellous transformation from balding forests to a lush green crown would not have been possible without the efforts of 35-year-old Subodh Ranjan Sur and his team from the Acharya Jagadhish Chandra Bose Vriksha Mitra Samiti (AJCBVMS). Joint forest management (by local people and the forest department) is a concept that has grown over the last 10 to

12 years. On its own the forest department finds it cannot guard the forests from the timber mafia or from the local communities who not only send in their cattle to graze but keep raiding the forests to get their requirement of firewood, fodder and timber.

In West Bengal and Gujarat there are marvellous examples of joint forest management. But this is the first example of the joint effort for managing forests in the North-East. Unlike Soumyadeep Datta — who is quite articulate — Subodh Sur is a quiet, self effacing person who draws inspiration from

Swami Vivekananda, the Nehru Yuvak Kendra with which he has been associated for several years now and his father, a freedom fighter. Subodh's entire life revolves around social forestry.

Subodh and the AJCBVMS got into joint forest management and partnership with the forest department just three to four years ago and the results are spectacular.

It was a committed forest officer, Achintya Sinha, who sought the support of the Samiti and in 1993 handed over 100 hectares of barren reserve forest land to their care. The Samiti quickly identified 230 families in four villages who were traditionally dependent on the forests. A committee comprising an elected representative from each village, the local forest officer

and the representative of the NGO was formed and the details of the experiment was worked out.

It was decided that all the labour work on the forest land would be done by these 230 families only. The number of man days work allotted to each family was also worked out based on the financial condition of the family. All 230 families were to have access to the

land for non-timber forest produce but the extent of access was to be determined by the committee. However, no family was allowed to cut a tree. If someone did disobey the judicial powers to tax or punish the person was vested with the committee.

Not only did the 230 families have a right to non-timber forest produce but to 50 per cent of the

■ Snippets

Replacing forests

ACCORDING to a Brandon and Homman (B&H) survey which appeared in *Down To Earth* some time back, India will have to spend 183.1 million US dollars as its annual reforestation cost. The survey took into account the deforested areas between 1981 and 1990 and put the average annual reforestation cost per hectare as 75 dollars.

The break-up: \$37.1 million will have to be spent to replace 495,000 hectares of tropical rain forest; \$ 28.4 million for 378,000 hectares of moist deciduous forest; \$ 96.3 million for 2141,000 hectares of dry deciduous forest and \$ 21.3 million for 355,000 hectares of hill and montane forest.

The total deforested area comes to 3369,000 hectares.

Depleting forests

THE world is losing its forests, but the rate at which it is happening in Asia is fast. This may be due to the region's dynamic economic growth. Of the world's top five countries that lost the greatest proportion of their forest land between 1985 and 1993, four were in Asia.