

Forest DIG wants to initiate action against our reporter. They don't look for hunters, they blame newspaper

Poaching in Morni: Express nails forest dept lie

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DEPUTY Inspector General of Forests Anmol Kumar must be a conscientious officer. In fact, so conscientious that within four days of *The Indian Express* report exposing illegal hunting, he says he wants to take legal action against, hold your breath, our reporter!

Referring to a report in *The Indian Express* on how Punjab VIPs are hunting boars in violation of the law, Kumar wrote: "A reading of the article shows that the author, Shri Vikram Jit Singh, has also been

(a) member of the shikar party in the wild boar hunt which is illegal under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972."

Vikram Jit Singh replies: The report that Mr Kumar refers to is part of a series of I have been doing since last November when a farmer died and another was shot in Kambwala village in the Morni foothills, 40 km from Chandigarh.

SPECIAL REPORT

Mr Kumar's regional representative, Conservator D.K. Sharma, told me he hasn't sent any of my reports, published in *The Indian Express* in Chandigarh, to the Ministry. I suggest that Mr Kumar call for these details rather than



spend his precious time searching for my address which is: The Indian Express, Chandigarh.

Two shikaris with a single-barrel .12 bore gun making a getaway from a hunt in the Ropar Kandi area.

garh.

To save some more of Mr Kumar's time, here's a summary. My reports have shown how hunting of wild boars by the landed gentry, big businessmen from Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula, bank officials, local shikaris, farmers, police officials and bureaucrats is rampant in this area. The culprits were never caught and forest officials had no doubt that there was no poaching in the area. Haryana Deputy Chief Wildlife Warden R.S. Lamba has vouched for it, saying there was "no shikar" in the area.

Three separate reports, from the wildlife warden, the DFO and the inspector

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investigating the case said the farmers were not shot by poachers, despite the villagers insisting they were. I reported this in *The Indian Express* on November 22, 2000, under the titles, 'Blood brothers: Beating the ban at Morni' and 'Case of contradictory claims.'

Even two months later, nothing has changed though villagers say they have identified the hunters who, according to them, belong to Panchkula. The suspects are reported to have been questioned though no arrests have been made.

On December 11, *The Indian Express* carried a report filed by me from the Ropar Kandi area — stretching from Noorpur Bedian to Phurkhali and on to the Siswan Shiwalik belt, a drive of about one

to one-and-a-half-hours from Chandigarh. The Ropar tracts are home to nearly 10,000 boars, 600 sambhars and partridges, peahens and red jungle fowl in large numbers. The report said, "The VIPs among the shikaris known to frequent the Ropar belt, especially over the weekend, include some IAS and IPS officers, an MLA, a minister, scions of certain royal families, landlords, a former Speaker of the Assembly and executive engineers of the irrigation department. They come from all over — Chandigarh, Nabha, Patiala and Jalandhar." As many as 92 poaching cases are in court while another 49 are at the challan stage here. But Ropar circle wildlife inspector Balwinder Singh was cer-

tain about one thing: "There are no VIPs involved in these cases. They are mostly small farmers and local people," he said. He also said that hunting was carried out in a very clandestine manner and at night. In fact, senior wildlife officials stay away from the hunting-prone areas and leave the effort to check poaching to lower-level field staff who are easily intimidated by VIPs.

That was why I decided to join a day-long hunt to prove that hunting was indeed being indulged in frequently by the VIPs though the wildlife departments were denying it. I returned to report on how poaching is neither a clandestine operation, nor undertaken by mall farmers operating alone.