

# PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

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### **Protected Area Update**

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## EDITORIAL

### **It's raining death for the elephants**

It's more than a year since the tiger T-24 (also known as Ustad) was adjudged guilty and moved swiftly from the forests of Ranthambhore to captivity in Udaipur (Editorial, *PA Update* Vol. XXI, No. 3). The story of this one animal has become a saga in its own right, there is still no consensus on what happened or what should have happened, and fierce debates and discussions continue unabated in this matter. It is also an unresolved puzzle as to how and why the fate of this one animal has managed to attract so much attention and importance. Conversely, why is it that other issues and the fate of other equally charismatic individual animals does not catch the attention of society and of the media like it did in the case of Ustad?

There are many examples that lend themselves to this question, and the specific focus here is on the number of cases in the last few weeks involving elephants. There have been at least four instances when wild individuals in their prime have been taken out of the equation for absolutely no fault of theirs. Madukkarai Maharaj, a tusker that roamed the forests near Coimbatore was declared a rogue and captured because of the damage he had been causing to agriculture and human life. We learnt only a couple of days later that he had died – some reports speculated that he died on account of being over-sedated, others suggested that he died of injuries sustained on account of banging his head against the enclosure he was held in.

A few days later another elephant, this time a 15 year old female was killed in a collision with a train near Madukkarai and a couple of weeks later there was a heart-breaking series of stories and pictures of another adult elephant knocked down by a speeding bus near Hosur in Karnataka. The pain and agony the still alive animal must have experienced can only be imagined because three days later he too

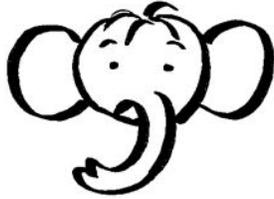
succumbed to his injuries. And at about the same time as this elephant was dying an agonising death there was news that another tusker, this time in West Bengal's Bankura district, had been identified, located with drones and shot dead. This one too had been declared a rogue for the threat he had become to agriculture and settlements and to human life.

In different ways each of these deaths was unnecessary and certainly not because the animal was at fault. An elephant dying in a road or a train accident is simply unacceptable; where the rogue elephants are concerned too we seem to completely ignore the larger landscape level changes and habitat destruction that have taken place, and for which the wild animal then pays a price with his freedom, if not his life.

Many complex issues are involved, there are many unresolved questions and importantly, these are not isolated incidents as anyone following wildlife related developments in the country will confirm. And yet, what we see in the media, both social and formal is a limited narrative if there is anything at all. It is as if the incidents did not happen, or if they did the issues have all been resolved. Nobody is asking how Madukkarai Maharaj died. Was he indeed over-sedated, or did he die of some other cause? Who was responsible for that, and have they been held to account? There are hardly any questions being asked about the destruction of habitats and of the merciless snapping of corridors that elephants have traditionally used. We are not asking why so many elephants are dying on a regular basis on railway lines and roads passing through elephant country and what can be done to prevent this?

The controversy over Ustad has been deemed in some quarters as unnecessary but it is important that the controversy helped ask important questions and brought facts to the public domain that would not have been known otherwise. It is a function, unpleasant to some, of an interested public and a vigilant media. It is a process by which we hold our governments, bureaucrats, representatives and also ourselves to account. The least we should do is ask the questions and keep asking the questions because otherwise there will be no hope for our

threatened wildlife and the many wilderness-scapes that are becoming increasingly vulnerable with every passing day!



Footnote: We have a new Minister for the Environment and Forests, and while it is an important development, there is a reason for it to only be a footnote here. It's a reflection of the importance that forests, environment and wildlife have in the larger scheme of things today. They have all become mere footnotes in the larger narrative of the politics and economic development of the country, and it's unlikely the new minister will undo the havoc that has been caused during his predecessor's term in office. We'd be happy to be proven wrong!

## NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

### ANDHRA PRADESH

#### High Court halts road construction in Krishna WLS

The High Court has ordered that the construction of a 2.5 km road, through the Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) be halted on account of it violating provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and the Coastal Regulation Zone rules. The road was being constructed near the Hamsaladevi area by the Panchayat for the upcoming Krishna Pushkaram, a religious ritual. The area falls under the purview of the Avanigedda Forest Range in the Eluru Wildlife Management Wing.

The matter was taken up by the Eastern Ghats Wildlife Society before the National Green Tribunal and through an online petition campaign. The Hyderabad based Hyderabad

Tiger Conservation Society (HyTiCoS) also brought the matter to the attention of the high court, which then ordered that the work be halted.

HyTiCos informed that there are similar roads being laid in wildlife sanctuaries such as Kolleru, Pulicat and Gundlabrameshwaram.

Source: Sulogna Mehta. 'Illegal road being laid through Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary', *The Times of India*, 06/06/16.  
'PIL halts road works in Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary', *The Hans India*, 21/06/16.

### ASSAM

#### Illegal fishing inside Kaziranga poses threat to rhinos



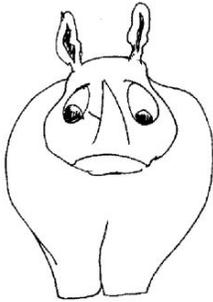
Wildlife activists have noted that continued illegal fishing at Panpur Ghat in the sixth addition of Kaziranga National Park (KNP) is posing a serious threat to rhinos. In a letter written to the Sonitpur deputy commissioner, it has been pointed out that despite a ban on fishing during the monsoon season, some miscreants, with alleged connivance of a few forest department officials, are regularly fishing inside the sixth addition of KNP under the Jamugurihat police station. Poachers too are known to take advantage of such illegal fishing activities to target rhinos.

The copy of the letter was also sent to the state forest minister and the director of KNP. The deputy commissioner is reported to have

instructed the authorities concerned to take necessary action.

Source: Pranab Kumar Das, 'Fishing threat to rhinos', *The Telegraph*, 28/06/16.

### **Suspected poachers including women arrested near Kaziranga NP; villagers vandalise poacher's house**



Two women living on the periphery of Kaziranga National Park (KNP) were arrested for their suspected involvement in the trade of rhino horns in early June. An amount of Rs. 25.24 lakh was recovered from their house. 19 persons have been arrested recently for their suspected involvement in poaching of rhinos and trade of rhino horns. These include four who were arrested from Golaghat district, two from Nagaon and four from Biswanath Chariali district. Weapons and ammunition was also recovered from those arrested.

The police intensified their operations against poachers after the KNP lost eight of its rhinos this year. The incident took place during the new forest and environment minister Pramila Rani Brahma's maiden stocktaking visit to the KNP. The carcass of the rhino was found between Boralimora and Uttor Kathoni under Agaratoli range. The minister is reported to have been contemplating revamping the administrative and security set-up of the park.

In the meanwhile, local villagers vented their ire against one Golap Talukdar, believed to be centrally involved in rhino poaching here. Over 200 villagers marched to his kutchra house and vandalised it. They asked Talukdar to leave the village within 24 hours. The attack lasted for about an hour and was triggered by the harassment the villagers say they face from police and forest personnel whenever there is any incident of poaching in the KNP.

Source: Ritupallab Saikia and Pranab Kumar Das. 'Women, rhino trade cash in net - Villagers vandalise poacher's house, minister monitors situation in Kaziranga', *The Telegraph*, 11/06/16.

### **Assam FD claims to have busted elephant smuggling racket**

The Assam Forest Department recently confiscated two female elephants that were being smuggled at Badhoi Panchali in Dibrugarh district. The elephants – one seven years in age and another eight - had reportedly been trapped in the jungles of Arunachal Pradesh.

The incident that occurred in April led to the arrest in June of three persons - a mahout, his helper, and a middleman all believed to be part of an elephant smuggling racket in the region. Forest officials say that the main culprits of this racket were tipped off and escaped even as a 50-member team of forest officials and police raided their hideout at Merapani in Golaghat district.

The mahout, and his helper along with the elephants were on their way to Merapani in Golaghat. They were intercepted at Badhoi Panchali and failed to produce legal ownership documents. The elephants were not micro-chipped either.

Forest officials say this racket is linked to another one in Nagaland, bordering Assam's Golaghat district, which supplies fake ownership documents for elephants illegally trapped in the wild. As the sale of captive elephants is banned, smugglers in Assam use fake documents to transfer jumbos to other states and then sell them illegally.

The confiscated elephants were shifted to the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation in Kaziranga National Park.

Source: Naresh Mitra. 'Elephant smuggling racket busted in Assam', *The Times of India*, 25/06/16.

## Gangetic dolphin becomes city animal of Guwahati



The city of Guwahati has declared the Gangetic dolphin as its official mascot. The move is aimed at generating awareness and highlighting conservation concerns for the urban biodiversity of Guwahati.

Three animals were considered for the title of the city animal – the Black softshell turtle, the Greater adjutant stork and the Gangetic river dolphin. The selection was done through an online and offline voting process that started on March 7 and went on for a period of three months, ending on June 5.

The Gangetic dolphin emerged the winner with 24,247 votes, followed by the stork (18,454 votes) and the turtle (17,302 votes). A total of 60,003 votes were received during the entire campaign.

Source: Mridul Ganguly, 'Gangetic dolphins declared as official mascot of Guwahati', *Down to Earth*, 09/06/16.

## BIHAR

### Breeding of gharials begins in Gandak river



The Gandak river in Bihar has established itself as the third breeding ground in the country for gharials. As part of a gharial conservation

programme of the Bihar Forest Department and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), a team of experts have been releasing captive-bred gharials into river Gandak in order to begin breeding in the wild.

Six nests were noticed recently along a stretch of about 700 meters of the river in April. Since then a team was formed to monitor it 24/7 along with two local villagers. On June 5, after 59 days, 7-8 hatchlings were seen to have emerged from the nests.

This is the third breeding population of gharials in the country after the Chambal and Girwa rivers. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, No. 2 and Vol. XXI, No. 2)

Source: 'River Gandak in Bihar becomes 3rd breeding ground for gharials', *Mid Day*, 08/06/16.

## GUJARAT

### Chief Minister seeks power for SBWL to clear drinking water and electricity projects

Gujarat chief minister Anandiben Patel has told the State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) to seek delegation of powers from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) so that the state's Principal Chief Conservator of Forest or the Chief Wildlife Warden can approve projects related to drinking water and electricity. The CM has asked officials to work on the proposal that would then be sent to the NBWL for approval.

During a meeting with the SBWL officials, she told them that apart from looking after wildlife, they should take care of communities living within sanctuaries or in their periphery. Some members of the SBWL have also suggested that the Gujarat government should take up the responsibility for carrying out a variety of works including the laying of electricity cables in sanctuaries.

Source: 'CM seeks project-clearing powers for state wildlife board', *The Times of India*, 28/06/16.

### **Rare White-tailed rat found in Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary**



A rare White-tailed wood rat, which has never been reported from the state of Gujarat was found in the Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary in the state's Narmada district recently. The animal was found dead, crushed by a speeding vehicle, by the Deputy conservator of forest, Narmada, Sandeep Kumar, during his regular rounds in the forests.

The White-tailed wood rat is endemic to South Asia. It has been reported from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka and in India from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and West Bengal. There is no mention in records anywhere of its presence in Gujarat.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Rare white-tailed rat found in Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary', *The Times of India*, 22/06/16.

### **HIMACHAL PRADESH**

#### **Over 50 Snow leopards in Himachal Pradesh**

An ongoing camera trapping exercise in Himachal Pradesh has suggested that the population of the Snow leopard in the state is about 55 animals. It is estimated to be 28 in the Spiti Valley and nearby areas and 29 for the rest of the state. The trapping is being conducted under the central government-funded Snow Leopard Conservation Project of Rs 5.15 crore. It involves monitoring of the habitat, range and behaviour of the felines.

A wildlife official said that they will soon radio-collar five or six snow leopards in Spiti and other areas to monitor their behaviour, habitat and range. Each radio collar costs around Rs. 3,00,000 and can send signals for at least 18 months.

Source: 'Himachal to begin breeding the highly-endangered snow leopards', [www.indialivetoday.com](http://www.indialivetoday.com), 28/06/16.

### **KARNATAKA**

#### **Karnataka witnesses row over legislator's suggestion for culling of elephants**

Karnataka is witnessing a row over the recent suggestion made by former Karnataka speaker and BJP legislator, KG Bopaiah, for the culling of elephants in Kodagu district. He said that Karnataka was the only state that has not responded to the Centre's request to send a report on wildlife causing damage to life and property. He said that in Kodagu alone, 16 people (all estate labourers) have been killed in the last one-year and that the situation was grave enough to justify culling.

He requested the state government to write to the Centre in the matter after collecting information about the damage to crops and people injured and killed.

Karnataka is home to over 6,000 elephants and facing serious conflict in Kodagu Somwarpet and Virajpet, bordering Thithimathi and Nagarhole, where two to three incidents of elephants destroying crops are reported every week.

Experts have noted that loss of habitat was one of the key drivers of the conflict and that the states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala should get together to tackle this issue as elephants did not follow state borders. It has also been suggested that the government should give suitable compensation to farmers on the spot in case of damage caused by elephants.

Source: Meera Bhardwaj, 'Bopaiah's jumbo culling call gets activists' goat', *The New Indian Express*, 24/06/16.

## KERALA

### Concerns over safety of tribal women watchers in Attappady forests

The forest department (FD)'s decision to depute 43 tribal women watchers in the deep jungles of Attappady without addressing their safety concerns and not providing any basic infrastructure has drawn condemnation from the tribal women's collective *Thaykula Sanghom*. Blaming the Mannarkkad divisional forest officer (DFO), the *Thaykula Sanghom* has sent petitions to the Chief Minister, the State Forest Minister and the Minister for the Development of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes seeking action against him.

Following the winding up of the Attappady Hill Area Development Society (AHADS), 93 tribal employees of the society were absorbed by the FD. 50 of the 93 who were men, were designated as forest watchers. The other 43, all women, were employed on deputation with the agriculture department to help improve functioning of a community farm in the locality.

It the month of May the DFO issued an order directing the 43 women watchers to return to their parent FD. Following this, the *Thaykula Sanghom* leaders have noted, the FD had been sending these women to inaccessible areas of the region such as Galasi, Thudukki and Aanavaayi, from where it's nearly impossible to return home in the evening. A few women have been posted at the Kuchipara station, which is 20 km away from the Silent Valley forests.

The *sanghom* leaders have alleged that the women were victimised for their role in an anti-liquor movement that forced closure of a retail outlet. However, the DFO has denied the allegations and said that the FD had provided adequate safety and infrastructure to the women watchers.

Source: K.A. Shaji. 'Tribal women watchers left exposed to dangers of forests', *The Hindu*, 15/06/16.

## MADHYA PRADESH

### EAC defers environment clearance for Ken-Betwa project

The expert appraisal committee (EAC) on river valley and hydroelectric projects of the Central Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, has deferred environment clearance for the Ken-Betwa river linking project as the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) is yet to give its final recommendations on reducing impact on wildlife. The decision was taken in the EAC meeting that was held on June 2. The panel has sought more clarity on wildlife and hydrological impacts, the National Water Development Agency (the project implementation authority) said.

Earlier, in February, the EAC had said that it will look at the project's green clearance only after the NBWL takes a call on its wildlife clearance. In order to study impact on wildlife, the NBWL had appointed an expert committee to inspect the Panna Tiger Reserve and submit a report to it. But on May 10, even before the expert committee could submit the report, it agreed to give in-principle wildlife clearance for the project. It did report, however, that many serious issues related to the project are yet to be resolved.

According to the EAC, PTR has unique geomorphological features that will be threatened due to the submergence. Tigers, leopards, bears and jungle cats use these features as shelters and to give birth. The water of the Ken river flows close to these structures and keeps them cool in summer. Besides, the 221-km canal linking the two rivers will fragment areas where foxes, jackals and leopards are found. Thus, the project is likely to affect crucial habitats. Hence, the EAC has recommended reducing the height of the Daudhan dam and compensating submergence of forest by adding more forest areas to the reserve. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXII, Nos. 3 & 2 and Vol. XXI, Nos. 4, 3 & 1).

Source: Nikhil M Ghanekar. 'Ken-Betwa green clearance deferred, MoEF panel seeks more studies', *DNA*, 06/06/16.

#### **46 tiger cubs recorded in Bandhavgarh TR**

46 tiger cubs have recently been photographed using camera traps in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR). While officials are still working to find out more details about these cubs, the Joint Director, BTR, said that about 35 cubs are in the age bracket of 10 to 24 months, and 11 cubs are below 11 months.

Officials say that there might be confusion over the identity of a few cubs due to different camera traps featuring the same animals; however they are confident that the number of cubs in the BTR was over 40.

The BTR has one of the highest tiger densities in the country, with over 70 tigers in the reserve. Because of this, the reserve has witnessed increasing incidents of human-animal conflict in recent years with significant casualties on both sides.



Source: Ritesh Mishra and Neeraj Santoshi, 'MP: 46 tiger cubs spotted at Bandhavgarh, but worries remain' *Hindustan Times*, 14/06/16.

## **MAHARASHTRA**

### **Pench TR celebrates foundation day with awards to staff**

The Pench Tiger Reserve (TR) celebrated its foundation day on June 20 with awards to its staff for outstanding work. The celebrations were held at the Amaltaas complex in Sillari and

were attended among others by the President, Wildlife Conservation Trust, Anish Andheria as chief guest, chief conservator of forests & field director MS Reddy, deputy director AW Nimje, divisional forest officer Bor TR, SB Bhalavi, assistant conservators of forests, Dipali Talmale & AB Tarsekar, RFOs, Atul Deokar, Pandurang Pakhale, Pravin Sathawane, Pravin Naik, Ritesh Bhongade, Nilesh Gawande and Dilip Dude.

Personal Mediclaim insurance was distributed to all the staff members from the Pench Foundation. Three students who are children of Pench staff members were awarded cash prizes for their commendable performance in SSC and HSC exams. Best eco-guides from each tourism gate were awarded a certificate and memento each for promoting tourism. Similarly field staff from all ranges was given certificates and mementos for their good work in forest protection, water management and works relating to eco-development committees.

Two STPF guards were also presented with certificates and mementos for protection work. Two eco-development committees formed in the villages - Khapa and Sarakha - were awarded a cash prize each and mementos for good work and for participation in development activities in their villages and adjoining forests.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Pench Tiger Reserve celebrates foundation day with award to staff', *The Times of India*, 23/06/16.

### **Two tigers collared in Brahmapuri forest division**

Two sub-adult tigers, a male and a female of the same litter, were radio-collared in the Brahmapuri forest division in Chandrapur. The collaring was done as part of the project titled 'Studying the dispersal of tigers across the Eastern Vidarbha Landscape'. At least three more tigers are to be fitted with satellite collars in Brahmapuri division in the phase-II collaring exercise under the project.

The exercise was carried out by the Wildlife Institute of India in the first week of June in the South Brahmapuri range. The female

cub weighing 104 kg and the male cub weighing 147 kg were tranquillized, captured and collared by the experts. The collared animals are those which have been earmarked for a proposed tiger translocation project.

The WII team, however, failed to tranquillize target tigers in the Umred-Karhandla and Tipheshwar Wildlife Sanctuaries (WLSs) during the seven-day schedule phase-II of the collaring exercise. This will be attempted now in the next phase. A total of 15 tigers are to be collared in Vidarbha.

The popular tiger of Umred Karhandla WLS, Jai, and an adult male of Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, 'Gabbar', were re-collared during the first phase of radio-collaring in March earlier this year. The previous collar on Jai, which had malfunctioned due to unknown reasons, was replaced with a new one. Gabbar too was tranquillized and its collar replaced. Gabbar was first collared in October 2014.

Source: Mazhar Ali. 'WII team radio-collars 2 tigers in Brahmapuri division', *The Times of India*, 13/06/16.

## MANIPUR

### **Sangai included in the Centre-sponsored endangered species recovery programme**

Found only in Manipur's Keibul Lamjao National Park, the *sangai* is one of the four species that have been included in the Centre-sponsored endangered species recovery programme. The other three are the Great Indian bustard, the Gangetic dolphin and the dugong.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has prepared a plan to secure the long-term survival of the sangai after extensive research. The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority under the Union ministry of environment, forests and climate change will fund the programme.

The plan will adopt a multi-pronged approach that includes conservation research, technology-aided management support, training and capacity building of the implementing agencies, monitoring population and habitats,

stakeholder sensitisation and mobilisation and mitigation of threats in priority habitats. For strengthening of the existing population of sangai in the park, the WII will monitor its population through scientific and genetic methods, set up a veterinary lab and establish a rescue-cum-conservation breeding centre.

The institute is also looking to establish a second wild population of the animal, for which a survey for a possible reintroduction site and development and demarcation of the site is on. Further, to improve the habitat condition and protection measures, the plan includes construction of anti-poaching camps in areas more vulnerable to poaching as well as resource extraction.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'Sangai finds place in 'recovery' plan', *The Telegraph*, 27/06/16.

## ODISHA

### **68 nesting sites of the estuarine crocodile located in Bhitarkanika NP**

A total of 68 nesting sites of the estuarine crocodile have been noticed this season in the Bhitarkanika National Park. 66 of these were spotted within the core area of park while two sites were found along the Mahanadi deltaic region under the Mahakalpada forest range outside the park territory. The total number of nesting sites counted last year was 66.

According to forest officials, the number of nesting sites may go up further as breeding activity was picking up. They are also taking extra care to ensure that the nests and eggs are not destroyed by predators like snakes, jackals and dogs. Entry for visitors in the protected area has also been restricted from May 31 to July 31 to ensure no disturbance.

Wildlife researchers have said that the habitat of this species has shrunk to about 26 sq km in the national park. Declining salinity level in some of the water bodies here seems to be creating less than ideal conditions for the crocs. They have also expressed the need for a study to ascertain whether the decline in salinity has

anything to do with reproductive ability of this species.

Source: '68 nesting sites of estuarine crocs spotted in Bhitarkanika', *The Hindu*, 14/06/16.

## TELANGANA

### **60 km stretch in Kawal TR to be re-opened for regular traffic; serious concern on wildlife safety**



The Telangana State Forest Department has reportedly consented to lift all restrictions on vehicular traffic on the 60-km stretch that passes through the Kawal Tiger Reserve (TR). This comes in the wake of a strong political push for the same and has raised serious concerns for the safety of wild animals here. The decision to reopen the road for all vehicles, and not just for local traffic, was being taken despite the field-level staff putting down in writing that such a move would be detrimental to wildlife.

The road had been closed to heavy traffic in January 2013 following a decision of the State Board of Wildlife of the then united state of Andhra Pradesh (*PA Updates* Vol. XIX, Nos. 5 & 3). Before the road was closed to heavy vehicles during the day and for all traffic at night, as many as 100 animals had been mowed down by vehicles passing on the stretch. This included leopards, Black naped hares as well as birds such as owls.

The 60-km stretch that connects Mancheri-Nirmal and Mancheri-Utnoor served as an unofficial bypass road for traffic between Adilabad and Hyderabad. More importantly, for those wanting to beat the law, this road helped them avoid paying toll tax that

they would have had to pay if they used the National Highway 7 to make the same trip.

It has been reported that a lobby of local politicians and businessmen, helped by a former Telugu Desam Party MLA who is now with the ruling Telangana Rashtriya Samiti, has been pushing for reopening of the forest road to all heavy traffic.

Source: Balakoteswhwara Rao. 'Animals in Kawal Tiger Reserve face traffic threat', *The Times of India*, 26/06/16.

## UTTARAKHAND

### **32 tigers in Terai-East division**

Uttarakhand Forest Department (FD) officials have spotted 32 tigers in the Terai-East division of Kumaon. According to the FD, these big cats were not part of the tiger census in 2015, which pegged the number of tigers in Uttarakhand at 340.

The Divisional forest officer (Terai-East division) informed that the census data in 2015 had only counted tigers present in the protected areas in Uttarakhand. Many other forest areas like Terai-East, Terai-West and Terai-Central had not been included in the count then.

Source: Vineet Upadhyay. 'Forest officials spot 32 new big cats in Uttarakhand', *The Times of India*, 29/06/16.

## UTTAR PRADESH

### **'Eco park' to be developed in reserve forests in Greater Noida; environmentalists object**

The Greater Noida authority has decided to develop an eco park across 2,500 acres on the lines of forest reserves in Paris in France. The park is proposed to be developed inside three forest reserves – 803 acres in Surajpur, 743 acres in Gulistanpur and 1,112 acres in Murshadpur. The proposal was mooted following the return from Paris of a team of forest department and Greater Noida authority

officials who made a five day visit to the city recently.

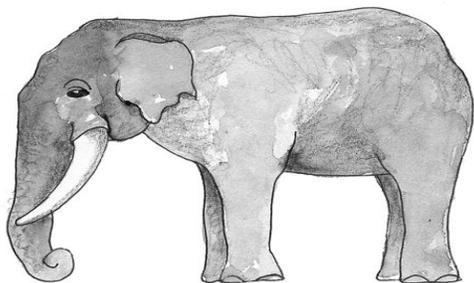
Akhilesh Yadav, chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, had announced the project of development of the eco park in Gautam Budh Nagar to combat rising pollution. Following his instructions, the authority allocated Rs.136 crore for the park.

Environmentalists have, however, objected to the development of an eco park on grounds that the developmental activities will destroy forest reserves and wildlife habitat in Surajpur. A petition in the matter filed in the National Green Tribunal had resulted in an order on May 30 to halt work on the park.

Source: Vinod Rajput, 'Greater Noida to develop eco park akin to forest reserves in Paris', *Hindustan Times*, 23/06/16.

## WEST BENGAL

### West Bengal seeks Centre's approval for capturing wild elephants; to prepare dossier on 'loner' males



The West Bengal government has sought the Centre's approval to catch wild elephants. The proposal is aimed at capping the animal's population in the wild and dealing with the increasing problem of human-elephant conflict in the state.

The West Bengal Forest Department (FD) has identified 18 elephants that are to be captured and sent to rehabilitation centres. These animals are said to have been straying into villages damaging crops and property. According to a wildlife department official, two rehab and rescue centres will come up in north

Bengal's Buxa Tiger Reserve and the another in south Bengal's Mayurjharna Elephant Reserve.

According to official estimates, problem elephants destroy crops spread over 2,500 to 3,000 acres in Bengal every year. They have claimed lives of as many as 89 people across the state in 2014-2015. The number for 2015-16 was 71. Seven elephant deaths were also reported in 2015-16.

In a related move the FD has also decided to maintain records and keep a tab on the behavior of solitary elephants — tuskers and maknas (tuskless males). A forester said it has been planned on the lines of history sheets of crime. These 'elephant dossiers will help them identify trouble-makers and will assist the department in a situation where a particular elephant has to be designated a rogue.

Details of all solitary elephants such as height, tusks — whether divergent, convergent or upward — tail, tail brush and size of footprints will be gathered by field staff, collated by their seniors and sent to the chief wildlife warden's office. Information on whether the elephant was in *musth*, when it raided a village or attacked a human will also be gathered. The focus would be on south Bengal since human-elephant conflict in this region has taken a turn for the worse in recent years. Recently, chief minister Mamata Banerjee transferred a forester here and asked the FD to make sure that no human lives are lost.

So far, information on a couple of solitary jumbos has been collected from Bankura. Similar information from Birbhum and Midnapore is yet to be gathered, while no lone elephant is said to be present in Burdwan at the moment. Last year, a tuskler was declared 'rogue' in Bankura's Goaldanga area. Hunters registered with FD were sent to the area to hunt it down, but as per official reports, the animal couldn't be tracked finally.

Over 2000 and 5000 hectares of jumbo habitat in Jharkhand and Odisha respectively are under mining activity forcing the elephants to move towards locations unsuited for them. The Dalma elephants' prolonged stay in south Bengal is a fallout of this (*PA Updates* Vol. XVIII, No. 1; Vol. XVII, No. 6; Vol. XVI, Nos.

3 & 1; Vol. XIV, Nos. 4 & 2; Vol. XI, No. 6; and Nos. 55, 52, 47 & 39).

Source: Bivas Bhattacharyya, 'Bengal seeks Centre's nod to catch wild tuskers to protect farmlands', *Hindustan Times*, 11/06/16  
Joydeep Thakur, 'Bengal identifies 18 jumbos for rehab', *Hindustan Times*, 13/06/16.  
Krishnendu Mukherjee. 'State writes jumbo dossiers', *The Times of India*, 26/06/16.

## SOUTH ASIA

### BANGLADESH / INDIA

#### **Farakka barrage causes decline in gharial population in Bangladesh**



A senior official of the Bangladesh Forest Department has said that the Farakka barrage constructed on the Indian part of the Ganga in 1975 has contributed in large measure to the decline of gharial population in the Padma river in Bangladesh. This was on account of the silting up of the river and the consequent destruction of gharial habitat. He was speaking during a recent workshop organized by the Bangladesh forest department (FD) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Bangladesh under the World Bank-funded Strengthening Regional Cooperation for Wildlife Protection (SRCWP) project. A draft of

the Bangladesh Gharial Management Plan was also presented on the occasion.

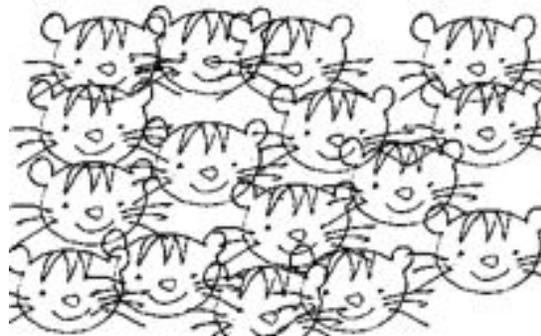
Stressing the need for taking up the issue of poor water flow of the country's rivers at bilateral meetings with India, the official said Bangladesh should take up a joint program with India to protect gharials from extinction. The current global population of the gharial is estimated to be 200 individuals, of which only 10 sighted were seen in the Padma and Jamuna rivers in Bangladesh in 2015.

Fishing nets, riverbank erosion, sand mining from rivers, water pollution, scarcity of fish species and poor water flow in rivers are believed to be among the major threats to gharials.

Source: 'Farakka causes rapid fall in gharial population: CCF', [www.daily-sun.com](http://www.daily-sun.com), 28/06/16.

### BHUTAN / INDIA

#### **Tigers making a comeback in Manas landscape straddling India, Bhutan; continued concerns on loss of forest, impact of infrastructure projects**



Tigers are making a comeback in the Manas landscape straddling the international boundary between Assam's Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) and Bhutan. The second monitoring of big cats across the Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA) covering Manas National Park (MNP) in India and the Royal Manas National Park (RMNP) in Bhutan has found a total of 21 individual tigers. 11 tigers were found in RMNP and 14 in MNP.

However, as four tigers were spotted on both sides of the border, the total individual tiger count stood at 21.

The first monitoring in TraMCA in 2011-12 found 14 individual tigers in the landscape.

The monitoring carried out by the MNP, RMNP, National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), WWF-India and Aaranyak last year, covered an area of 560 sq km of the two protected areas. The report of the findings was released by the Assam principal chief conservator of forest, D Mathur, at the two-day TraMCA meeting held recently in Guwahati.

Officials also raised serious concerns on the continued deforestation in the region. Specific concerns were expressed on the impact of large infrastructure projects like road laying and construction of power lines. Concern was also expressed about the proposed power projects such as the Mangdechhu (720MW), Kholongchhu (600MW) and Chamkharchhu (700MW), which, though located on the outer edge of Royal Manas, would cause huge loss to biodiversity following the construction of dams and diversion of water from the river basins.

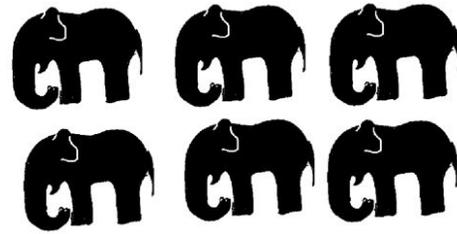
TraMCA, floated in 2008, is a joint initiative of India and Bhutan for trans-boundary biodiversity conservation across the international boundary. The landscape includes MNP in India and RMNP, and the Phipsoo and Jomotshangkha Wildlife Sanctuaries in Bhutan.

Source: Naresh Mitra. Tigers are making comeback in Manas landscape straddling India, Bhutan, *The Times of India* 23/06/16.  
'Concern over Manas deforestation', *The Telegraph*, 24/06/16.



## NEPAL / INDIA

### Increased human-elephant conflict in Kolabari area along the Indo-Nepal border



Human elephant conflict has intensified in West Bengal's Kolabari area along the Indo-Nepal border. The area is home to about 4000 households and a herd of 80 -100 elephants in a small patch of forest here. In 2015, four elephant deaths were reported only from the Terai region of north Bengal; 15 human deaths have also been reported from here in the same period.

Until a few years ago, the elephants spent the summer months in north Bengal's Terai region, including areas like Tukriajhar and Kolabari, and then crossed the Mechi river for their stay in Nepal. In the recent times, however, they have started staying back in these areas, particularly in Tukriajhar, well into the maize season i.e. in May, June, July and August. The trigger is a 17-km long stretch of solar fencing, which was constructed in 2015 and has blocked the traditional migration route of the elephants (*PA Update* Vol XIV, No. 4).

The fresh activities now threaten to take conflict to the elephants' home in the remaining forest patches of north Bengal's Terai region as the elephants' migration route from Kolabari to Lamagumba forest in Kurseong is also being taken up by human settlements.

Source: Krishnendu Mukherjee. 'Elephantine Worry - Corridors lost, jumbos face conflict at home in N Bengal forests', *The Times of India*, 12/06/16.

## The State of Wildlife in North-East India – 1996-2011

A compilation of news from the *Protected Area Update*

Edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria

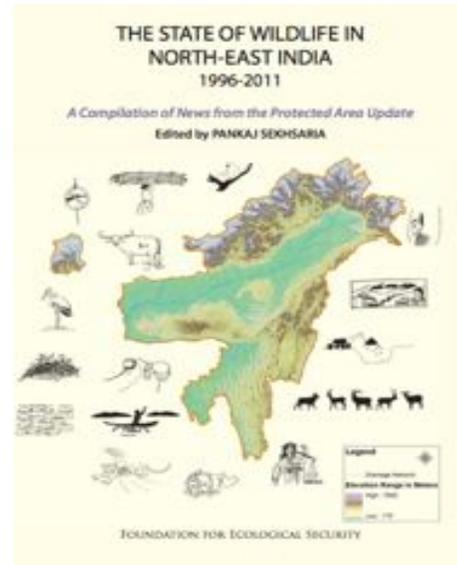
**List of Contents:** North East India Regional News; News from the States: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura.

**Perspective & Opinion:** The Print Media's Kaziranga obsession – An analysis (Mehak Siddiqui & C Rajesh Reddi); A case study of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation in western Assam (Sonali Ghosh: Snow leopards in the land of the rising sun (Yash Veer Bhatnagar); Karbi Anglong: A little known wilderness of Assam (Anwaruddin Choudhury); Elephants and other memories of the Garo Hills (Nimesh Ved); Dams in the North East (Neeraj Vagholikar) and Community conservation of wildlife (Neema Pathak)

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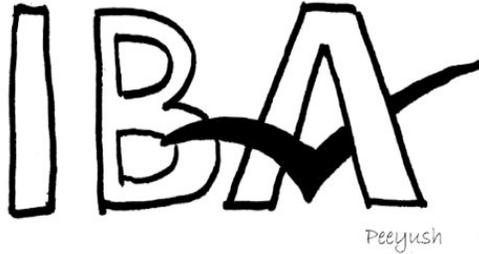
### INVITING COLLABORATIONS

The *Protected Area Update*, which is now in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year of publication, has consistently provided news, information and analysis on matters related to wildlife, conservation and protected areas. It has created a credible forum that allows for discussion on a wide-range of often un-addressed issues in the wildlife, conservation and livelihood landscape. It reaches out widely and also represents a wide-range of perspectives and concerns.

We would like to invite, researchers, NGOs, journalists and individuals to collaborate and use the *Protected Area Update* as a platform to further common interests in these related subjects. The newsletter can be used as a platform to put out short analyses and synthesis of ongoing work or work that has already been completed – on lines similar to the update above on the new developments in relation to culling of certain species of wildlife by declaring them vermin. The *PA Update* can also be used, simultaneously and complementarily, as a platform for seeking and gathering information where it is needed.

Please write to the editor at [psekhsaria@gmail.com](mailto:psekhsaria@gmail.com) with ideas, queries and suggestions on how these collaborations could be made to work and for specific proposals that are of interest to you.

## ***Important Bird Areas Update***



### **MAHARASHTRA**

#### **MPCB to reassess location of proposed factory near GIB sanctuary**

The Maharashtra State Pollution Control Board (MPCB) will reassess the location of a chemical manufacturing unit, currently proposed at a distance of 1.46 km from the nearest village in the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) Sanctuary in Solapur.

The state-level expert appraisal committee, in the initial hearing for granting environmental clearance to the proposed bulk drugs, intermediaries and chemicals manufacturing unit of Challa Chlorides Pvt. Ltd., contended that the ecologically sensitive zone (ESZ) of GIB sanctuary was yet to be identified. In its next meeting, the committee decided to give a go-ahead along with suggestions to prevent environmental impact. The committee officials also said that the MPCB should verify the location of the project with reference to the boundary of the GIB sanctuary before granting consent to operate.

The regional office of the MPCB in Pune is yet to conduct a survey but is expected to look into the matter of the location of this company soon. In the meanwhile, the forest department too has plans to declare a 400 sq km area surrounding the 366.76 sq km sanctuary as an ESZ. The decision is still pending, but once it comes into effect, will have a significant implication on the siting of the factory.

Source: Sadaguru Pandit. 'Fate of GIB Solapur Sanctuary now in the hands of MPCB', *The Asian Age*, 17/06/16.

#### **Survey finds 266 bird species in and around proposed Navi Mumbai airport site**

A baseline survey conducted by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in 2014-15 has shown that there are 266 bird species within a 10 km radius of the proposed Navi Mumbai international airport site throughout the year. The BNHS has expressed concerns over bird strikes at the site and has suggested that attempts should be made to make the site and adjoining areas non-attractive to birds.

The survey noted that the proposed airport site was a high bird diversity area because of a mixture of habitats such as creeks, seashore, paddy fields, forest, wetlands and mangroves. In order to avoid bird strikes and manage the nearby landscape the BNHS had recommended that potential bird areas as shown in the study map, but outside the airport influence region, should be protected.

Environmentalists have also pointed out that the airport runway will be close to the mangroves and wetlands. The Karnala Bird Sanctuary also falls within a distance of 10 km radius from the site.

Source: Vijay Singh. 'A winged territory? Proposed Navi Mumbai airport site is home to 266 bird species', *The Times of India*, 05/06/16.

## RAJASTHAN

### No more windmills in GIB areas in Rajasthan



The Rajasthan government has now decided not to set up any windmills for wind power projects in the areas inhabited by the Great Indian Bustard (GIB). A majority of wind power projects in Rajasthan have come up in and around the desert town of Jaisalmer which is also one of the main areas for these birds.

The population of the bird in the state was estimated between 20 and 28 about a year ago. It has been suggested that windmills that were set up in GIB zones have forced these birds to move out of these zones, resulting in their increased vulnerability.

Source: 'No more windmills in bustard-inhabited areas in Rajasthan', *The Times of India*, 27/06/16.

### Measures taken for eradication of Mangur fish from the Keoladeo NP

Special measures are being initiated in the Keoladeo National Park (NP) to eradicate the African catfish *Clarias gariepinus*. Known locally as the *Mangur*, this invasive species has rapidly come to dominate the park's water-bodies and is threatening aquatic and avian fauna here.

The fish, a hardy, widely-distributed fish from Africa was introduced in South and South-East Asia for the purpose of pisciculture. Not only can it thrive in extreme environmental conditions, it can also crawl over ground to colonize nearby water bodies. The resilience

that makes the fish economically beneficial is what makes it environmentally hazardous.

The action plan for its extermination from Keoladeo notes that the fish is omnivorous in its feeding habits, feeds largely on fish, insects and crustaceans, is known to attack healthy animals and also influences distribution and feeding of other fish. In recent years, water birds and terrestrial birds have been recorded in the diet of the African catfish.

Last year, park authorities destroyed a staggering 40,117 African catfish under Operation Mangur. After a thorough reconnaissance of the area, park staff, rickshaw pullers and members of a local NGO were trained to identify and differentiate between indigenous and invasive species of fish within the infested water bodies. Native species were then temporarily relocated to a separate site, while the infested waters were pumped out in order to expose the catfish. The African catfish was then removed manually, by fixing iron mesh gates, isolating ponds and using fishing nets. The collected catfish were either dumped at different points in the park, away from water bodies, or buried.

According to the field director of the park, this year's activities under the Operation Mangur ended on June 23. Every water-body in the park was treated, including D block which was left out last year. The current action plan is devised for ten years in order to completely eliminate catfish from re-entering the water bodies, and will continue till 2026.

Source: Stuti Pachisia, 'Bharatpur Authorities Battle Catfish Invasion', [www.sanctuaryasia.com](http://www.sanctuaryasia.com), July 2016

**The Important Bird Areas Update is being brought out in collaboration with and support from the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, UK)**

## Obituary

### Remembering Chaenta

by Shankar Chandra

Chaenta was my friend. He died a few days ago. I've been struggling to say something about him but I can't. What can one say of a person you think will be around forever but ups and leaves? There was nothing really the matter with him. We had plans. He had a strange sense of humour. He laughed at himself, his situation, his friends, his family, his past and whatever he imagined was his future. It was a gentle, slightly mischievous laugh. He knew something that the rest of us didn't.

He worked hard and drank little. He loved his land as much as he hated it. It frustrated his best efforts at making it productive. He was a man of the forest, possessed of a nobility that wouldn't allow him to bend where others groveled. He never had much money, but he wasn't poor. His crops failed with a brutal regularity, but he just worked harder. I can't say I understand what drove him. The government took his good land away, he shrugged and went to work for a daily wage at the sanctuary that had displaced him. He got rubbish land in compensation but he squared his shoulders and set to work clearing it of rocks. The rains failed again and again, he put his head down and dug a well. The well ran dry and then he came over to work with us, and to wait for the next year's rains.

We used to tramp around the forest near our village. He used to take me around and show me the trees and the shrubs, the game tracks and the river pools where fish might be found. He was a most patient teacher. He'd tell me the names of things I should know, which I would soon forget, and then he would tell me those names again. We spoke endlessly about trapping and hunting but never did any –

satisfying ourselves with the occasional trip to the village chicken seller.

The last time I met him, I told him I had acquired a bow and some arrows. We were going to try them out when we met again. He's gone off to his happy hunting grounds I'm afraid. And I'm left here thinking about him. My partner wrote in her memorial to him, "May there be wonderful forests, a deep river and absolutely no struggles where you are today..."

I'll see you in that forest my friend. I hope you'll show me the ropes there as you did here.

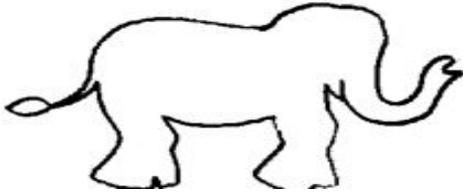
*Chaenta (Harjeeta Adivasi) was about 43 years old, and lived in village Paira in district Sheopur, Madhya Pradesh. In 2001, his village was moved from the banks of river Kuno to a rocky patch of land on the periphery of the Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary. This was done as a part of a project for Asiatic Lions Reintroduction, for which it was deemed necessary to displace and relocate 24 villages and about 5000 people from the Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary. Chaenta spoke eloquently of his relocation experiences in the film Make Way: A Kuno Story, that I directed and produced in 2016. The film is available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1gJ7zPrYb4>.*

- **Shankar Chandra** is a filmmaker who is working with the Sahariya Adivasis of the Kuno Sanctuary with the NGOs Samrakshan Trust and Adharshila Shiksha Samiti.  
Email: [chandra.shankar@gmail.com](mailto:chandra.shankar@gmail.com)

**A Decade Ago**  
**Protected Area Update 62, August 2006**

**KARNATAKA**

**20 wild elephants from Hassan to be translocated to Bhadra WLS**



The office of the Deputy Conservation of Forests, Hassan Division has formulated a Rs. 79 lakh proposal to translocate 20 wild elephants from here to the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary. These elephants have caused widespread damage to crops in the region and nine people have been trampled to death in the last three years. The proposal is said to be the outcome of a high-level meeting conducted by Minister for Forests, Ecology and Environment, C Chennigappa on June 14 in Hassan.

Six short measures have also been proposed to deal with the problem. These include erecting a 60 km solar fencing and digging of a trench along the forest boundary to prevent elephants from entering into private lands; providing more vehicles, arms and walkie-talkies to the forest staff to act swiftly; construction of 43 check-dams and five nala bunds and removal of silt in various tanks in the forest to ensure drinking water for wild elephants; increase compensation to relatives of those who die in elephant attacks and to those who are disabled permanently, and to farmers for crop loss. The Forest Department here has already paid a compensation of Rs. 57.6 lakh for both, deaths and crop damage, in the last three years.

An analysis of the problem indicates that the elephants were moving from the adjacent Kodagu and Mysore districts to Alur, Sakleshpur and Arkalgud taluks of Hassan district. Construction of dams across the

Cauvery and the Hemavathi from 1974 to 1982 had resulted in submergence of elephant habitat in Kodagu and Mysore districts. Flowering of bamboo which is a staple food for elephants also led to its drying up in large areas. Droughts for three successive years had further compounded the problem. The clandestine manufacturing of illicit liquor in forest areas is said to be another reason attracting elephants here.

The department was likely to capture these 20 elephants in Kattepura and Doddabetta forest area with the help of experts after the monsoon.

Source: '20 wild elephants to be translocated', *The Hindu*, 29/06/06.

**WEST BENGAL**

**Questions about expensive anti-poaching camps in Buxa**

The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), West Bengal has raised questions about the money spent on setting up of the four anti-poaching camps in Buxa Tiger Reserve (BTR) – West. This follows the PCCF's visit to the area in May in response to complaints lodged by a section of the forest employees.

In a letter to the Director of the park, the PCCF has pointed out that more than Rs. Five lakhs were spent on each of these camps whereas similar work had been done in Jaldapara for only Rs. 25,000. The letter also took objection of the action of the Divisional Field Director (West), to distribute ration among the on-duty staff, which is said to be illegal.

Questions were also asked about unnecessary spending on the construction of the Hatipota Rest House as well as the lack of transparency in the digging of a pond in Nimati West beat, where the beat officer concerned was unaware of the project.

Source: Shankar Mukherjee. 'Forest funds wasted', *The Telegraph*, 05/07/06.

## **Independent Experts Submission to the MoEFCC's Expert Appraisal Committee on River Valley Projects, regarding the Ken-Betwa link**

June 1, 2016

To

The Chairman and Members of EAC on River Valley Projects, MoEF, New Delhi

Urgent: Concerns about Ken Betwa Project on EAC agenda for Environment Clearance for meeting on June 2-3, 2016\*

Respected Chairman and Members,

### 1. No documents since Feb EAC meeting:

In continuation of our earlier submissions of Aug 21, 2015, Oct 24, 2015, Feb 6, 2016 and April 15, 2016, we are writing to you again since the Ken Betwa Link is again on the EAC agenda for the meeting on June 2-3, 2016. It may be noted that after the project was earlier considered by the EAC, latest in the meeting on Feb 8-9, 2016, no new documents are available on the EC website. This itself is a serious lacuna since this means that all concerned are in dark as to why the project is being reconsidered by the EAC, and what progress has been achieved since the last meeting. This is also in violation of the orders of the Central Information Commission that required all such documents be available in public domain at least ten days in advance of the meeting.

### 2. Issues raised in SANDRP submission of Feb 6, 2016 not addressed:

In our submission of Feb 6, 2016, we had pointed out, firstly, how inadequate the NWDA response dated Jan 5, 2016 was to our earlier submissions, and also how seriously problematic and flawed the NWDA contention was about doing Landscape Management Plan during construction of the project. There was neither any discussion in EAC or application of mind by the EAC as appears from the minutes of the Feb 2016 EAC, about our submission of Feb 6, 2016, adequacy of NWDA response of Jan 5, 2016 nor has there been any response from the NWDA in public domain.

### 3. Landscape Management Plan not available, external expert view not taken:

The Minutes of the 91st meeting of EAC held on Feb 8-9, 2016 had noted, when this project was last considered by EAC, "The committee observed that the Landscape Management Plan (LMP) is being prepared by WII, Dehradun; in absence of a plan, the committee cannot examine the proposal. EAC also mentioned, after completion of plan, obtaining a second opinion on the LMP from external expert the project will be reconsidered again for EC and also handed over 4 representations received from NGOs/ Environmentalists including that of former Secretary, Government of India Shri EAS Sarma to project proponent for compliance." The LMP being prepared by WII is not available, nor has there been any independent expert evaluation of the LMP, so considering the project without these will clearly be in violation of EAC's own decision.

### 4. PTR director's rejection of proposal and SBWL over ruling PTR director without recording reasons:

The minutes of 91st EAC also noted: "The committee was informed by the project proponent that the project has been approved by the State Wildlife Board. The committee noted that the director of the Panna Tiger Reserve had not recommended the project, as per the agenda of the Board meeting and the board had overruled him and approved the project without recording detailed reasons for such rejection." This situation is still unaddressed, so the clearance of the State Board of Wildlife is not even legally tenable.

### 5. Committee of experts recommended by EAC not known to be formed, report not available in public domain:

The Minutes of the 91st EAC further noted: "Comments of HS Kingra, Vice Chairman and member of the Committee are as follows: The matter related to the effect of the Ken-Betwa

project on Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) and the breeding ground for vulture was discussed in the 91st meeting of the EAC. It was seen that submergence of 4141 Ha of the PTR is a serious issue and needs to be studied by some independent expert committee and the findings of such a committee be placed before the MP State Wild Life Board (MPSWLB) and NBWL. The agenda related to the clearance by MPSWLB was perused and it was noted that in the agenda notes the then director PTR did not recommend in favour of submergence of the huge area of PTR and loss of breeding habitat for the vultures. State Chief Wild Life Warden (SCWLW) Mr. Ravi Kumar IFS also agreed with the views of the then Director, PTR and endorsed his views without any modification. How and what expertise the MPSWLB had over and above the technical advice rendered by Director PTR and SCWLW of MP is not clear from the minutes or agenda notes placed before the MPSWLB. It is understood that as per convention and the extant Rules of Business of the State Government the SCWLW must be the chief technical advisor to the Government of MP on matters related to Wild Life. How the board overruled the advice of SCWLW is not properly recorded in the minutes of the Board meeting. It is therefore opined that an independent committee of three experts be constituted by the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change in consultation with the EAC to give specific recommendations related to submergence of PTR Core area and the habitat loss for breeding of vultures. It is then only that the project can be considered for Environment Clearance.” There is nothing in the public domain to show that this decision of the EAC in Feb 2016 has been implemented by MoEF&CC, nor is the report of such a committee, if formed, available in public domain. Considering the project without these would clearly be in violation of the EAC’s own decision.

6. Flawed NBWL Standing Committee recommendation cannot be basis for EAC:

The 91st EAC meeting further concluded: “After detailed deliberations, the EAC accepted the views expressed by. H.S. Kingra, Vice-

Chairman and member of the committee and considered the compliance report submitted by the project proponent and decided that the project will be considered for Environmental Clearance (EC) only after wildlife clearance of the project is obtained from NBWL in the manner proposed by Mr. Kingra. The project proponent may submit again the proposal for EC along with the decisions of NBWL.” It may be added that the minutes (dated March 15, 2016) of the 37th meeting of the Standing Committee (SC) of the NBWL held on Feb, 26 2016 had decided to set up a sub committee that will visit the project area and report back to NBWL-SC, and only after that NBWL-SC will take a decision. However, Media reported that the NBWL Standing Committee (SC) cleared the project on May 10, 2016. (<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/ken-betwa-prakash-javadekar-river-linking-project-wildlife-panna-tiger-reserve-gets-wildlife-go-ahead-before-site-visit-report-2796067/>). The Media also reported that the NBWL-SC recommended wildlife clearance to the project without having the report of the sub committee. However, the minutes of the 38th meeting of NBWL SC held on May 10, 2016 or the site visit report of the sub committee of NBWL-SC are still not in public domain, either on MoEF’s website (<http://envfor.nic.in/division/orders-and-releases>), nor on Env Clearance website (<http://environmentclearance.nic.in/onlineSearch.aspx>) of MoEF. Nor is the letter from MoEF giving wildlife clearance to Ken Betwa project in public domain. The claimed wildlife clearance to the project by NBWL-SC in any case is not legally tenable since it violated the decision of the NBWL-WC in the previous meeting. The Central Empowered Committee of Supreme Court of India is bound to take this flawed decision to the Supreme Court and project could face further legal challenges. We hope EAC will not decide about EC for Ken Betwa on such a flawed and legally untenable and non transparent decision.

7. EAC consistently misled by NWDA and EIA consultant of Ken Betwa – I: Impact on Vulture habitat:

As our letter dated Feb 6, 2016 said, “The NWDA response dated 05.01.2016 says on page 3 that SBWL has approved the project on conditions, which include: "The study of mitigation impact on vulture habitat at project cost by BNHS". This again is an admission that firstly, there is not even study of impact of the project on vulture habitat, nor the mitigation has been planned, these should have been part of the EIA-EMP and cannot be done post approval/launching of construction.” For example, the minutes of EAC dated Aug 24-25, 2015 noted: “There is no threat to Vulture population because only 3% habitat of vulture will be submerged and 97% of habitat will be more than 100 m above HFL.” As against this, the minutes of NBWL-SC meeting of Feb 26, 2016 that there will be “50% loss of existing unique habitat of highly endangered Vulture spp.” EAC needs to immediately take note of the lies that NWDA and AFCL has been telling the EAC on this issue and take immediate action against them, including suspending all consideration of the project till this issue is adequately addressed.

8. EAC consistently misled by NWDA and EIA consultant of Ken Betwa – 2: Impact of KBLP on Panna Tiger Reserve:

The minutes of the 37th NWBL-SC meeting of Feb 26, 2016 makes it clear that KBLP will submerge 5803 ha of PTR, against 4141 Ha that the EIA and NWDA submissions to EAC mention. This is massive 30% under reporting of submergence area of PTR by NWDA and AFCL. Moreover, 10523 ha of Core Tiger Reserve area will be lost due to “fragmentation and loss of connectivity, displacement of 10 villages etc.” says the NBWL SC minutes. The EIA does not even mention this impact. When this was repeatedly mentioned in various submissions to EAC, each time NWDA just denied it, without bothering to do any assessment. Now that an official agency has reiterated this in no uncertain terms, what will the EAC, NWDA and AFCL do? Will MoEF take action against any of them? The EAC should immediately suspend consideration of the KBLP till such gross inconsistencies are addressed.

9. EAC consistently misled by NWDA and EIA consultant of Ken Betwa – 3: Impact of KBLP on Ken Ghariyal Sanctuary:

A number of people, including Prof Brij Gopal and SANDRP had written to EAC showing how KBLP will impact the Ken Ghariyal Sanctuary as one of the barrages of KBLP is to be constructed inside the Ken Ghariyal Sanctuary, as mentioned in the latest Detailed Project Report of KBLP. But there was no response from NWDA, AFCL or EAC, except NWDA repeatedly claiming that Ken Ghariyal sanctuary will benefit from KBLP! It is good now to see that the minutes of the Feb 26, 2016 meeting of NBWL-SC has recorded concerns of Dr R Sukumar about the KBLP impact on Ken Ghariyal Sanctuary and hope now such impacts will be properly assessed. In the meantime, this is another issue on which EAC and MoEF needs to take the developer and EIA consultants to task. In any case, till this is satisfactorily addressed, the EAC cannot consider the project for EC.

For more details about the last three points, see: <https://sandrp.wordpress.com/2016/03/17/nwda-eia-lies-on-ken-betwa-river-link-nailed-by-igfwl-will-eac-take-action-against-them-now/>

10. Suspend EAC's flawed decision about Lower Orr Project:

The EAC, in its meeting in May 2016 has recommended Environment Clearance to the Lower Orr Project in Madhya Pradesh, which is actually part of the full Ken Betwa Link Project. Lower Orr project becomes viable only if Phase I of the Ken Betwa link project is viable, since without transfer of water from Ken to Betwa, upper Betwa basin will have no water to spare for additional project. Since Phase I of the Ken Betwa project is yet to get all the clearances and also achieve implementation agreement between participating states (UP and MP), there is no guarantee of the viability of the Lower Orr Project in Upper Betwa basin. Hence EAC has recommended clearance to a project whose hydrological viability itself is uncertain. EAC should hence immediately suspend its decision about Lower Orr Project. The EAC decision on Lower Orr Project is wrong on two additional counts. As the EAC minutes of May 2016

meeting clearly say, the EIA of the project did not include full command area of the Lower Orr project and that will be considered separately. This is completely against the basic tenet of considering all impacts of the project simultaneously and not in piecemeal manner as EAC has done. Secondly, the EAC should consider the full Ken Betwa Project with all its components in one go and not in piecemeal manner as it is doing. On both counts EAC consideration is flawed and should be reviewed. EAC also need to look at all the existing, cleared and proposed projects in Ken & Betwa basins by asking for cumulative impact assessment in both basins, rather than considering each project separately. For example, EAC agenda for June 2-3, 2016 meeting includes another project in Panna district.

11. KBLP to facilitate EXPORT OF water from Bundelkhand?:

It is clear that in essence, the KBLP is facilitating transfer of water from Ken basin (Bundelkhand) to Upper Betwa Basin (outside Bundelkhand). Thus any claim that KBLP is going to help Bundelkhand is clearly flawed and misleading at the outset.

12. Where is the Water for KBLP?:

As we have been raising this issue repeatedly in the past, the hydrological viability of the Ken Betwa project is far from established, the hydrological figures are not in public domain,

NWDA water balance studies are out dated and not peer reviewed or in public domain, and EAC should not be taking any decision about the project in such a situation, till all NWDA water balance studies and hydrological data is in public domain and an independent review of them is possible. This hydrological non-viability got further reinforced during the current drought when Ken was dried up several locations and Betwa was flowing, and there was proposal to take train loads of water from Betwa to Ken Basin. We will look forward to EAC applying its mind to the various issues we have raised and NWDA responses, on their merits and arriving at a judgment. We would be happy to come to EAC meeting to explain this further if necessary.

Thanking you,

Yours Sincerely,

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## **PERSPECTIVE**

### **Mainstreaming sustainable fisheries: The need of hour in the Gulf of Kachchh**

*“There were dense mangrove plantations along the coastal belt, many fold of what stand today when I went picking fire-wood with my father in the mangrove creeks and encountered several fishes swim by. I still clearly remember the day when we decided to carry few home for dinner. He helped me make a spear and after endless attempts for hours, we carried 2 big fishes home and the whole family relished over it, sleeping with a full stomach and feeling content after a long time”*

- 82 year old fishermen, *Yusuf Kasam Malam* (*Malam* - the one who has knowledge of the sea).

Historically, fishermen in the Gujarat’s Gulf of Kachchh (GOK) region have been fishing sustainably and at a subsistence scale. Things have changed and fishes such as sawfish, rays, hilsa, bronze croaker, and *Ghol* that were once found in abundance have disappeared or dwindled significantly.

Government subsidies in the 80s transformed the face of commercial fisheries here, marginalizing traditional fishermen. Open access to fish resources has also contributed to overfishing, with trawl fishermen arguing ‘someone else will take away the fish if they don’t’, when questioned on their unsustainable ways of fishing. While it is the fishing community that is blamed for falling fish catch, it always has been the government who encouraged and focused on commercializing fisheries.

The unsustainability has now started to manifest itself in different ways among all fisher communities, either in their catch composition or species targeted or both. The recent shift to large scale fishing of jelly fish by a few fishing communities in GOK is a classic example of ‘fishing down the food-web’, a widely known phenomena of targeting species of lower trophic level in the absence of resources of high trophic level. The recent growth in demand of jellyfish in the international seafood market may have influenced this shift too and only further research can give us a full explanation of these developments.

Another important issue is that of planning. 87% of Gulf of Kachchh Marine National Park (MNP) overlaps with the Gujarat Maritime Board for port development and vessel channels, and the conflicts this will throw up are evident. The emphasis on coastal development and industrialization too has greatly impacted the fish habitats. There are a number of other conflicts that exist at the same time - between subsistence fishermen (*pagadia*) and traditional boats, non-motorized and motorized crafts, motorized crafts and mechanized or trawls, and trawl fishermen and commercial vessels.

The challenges are huge and there is a need to mainstream traditional fishing practices and also recognize sustainable fisheries. A gap analysis needs to be done of ongoing fishing practices and a fisheries improvement plan needs to be implemented through community participation. There is also a need to better manage marine and coastal space by giving priority to fisherfolk activities like landing, sorting, drying, packaging, and parking boats. Fisherfolk and sustainable fisheries need to be made the centre-piece for any meaningful development along this coastline.

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