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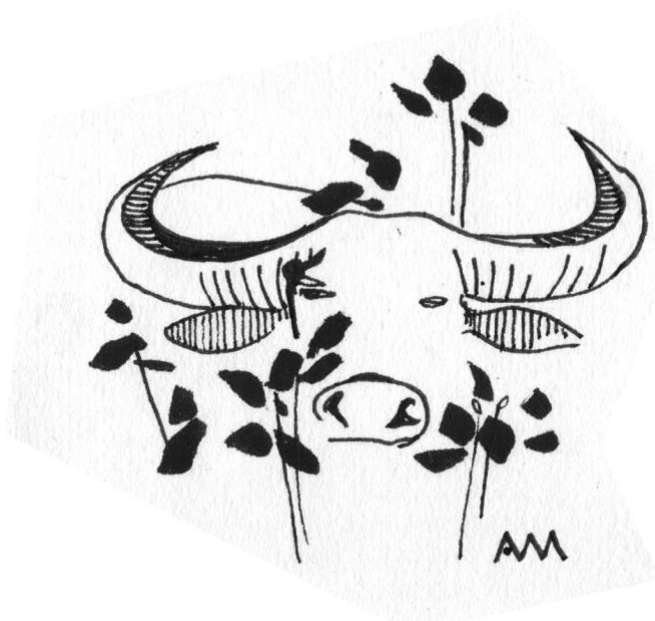
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EDITORIAL

Heartbreak in Great Nicobar

After nearly three years of arguments and counter-arguments, the National Green Tribunal (NGT), in its order of 16 February finally allowed the Great Nicobar mega infrastructure project to go ahead without any encumbrances. This was expected given the recent record of the NGT in general and its interim orders in this specific case. Yet, the disappointment was obvious when the final nail was hammered in.

The petitioners and multiple researchers have put together mountains of evidence showing violations of several laws including the Wildlife Protection Act, the Indian Forest Act, coastal zone regulations and the Forest Rights Act among others. Yet, the NGT saw no problem with the project that is located in one of the most sensitive ecosystems from an ecological and geological perspective and clearly violative of the rights of indigenous communities here.

In what was perhaps the biggest irony, 100s of leatherbacks were recorded nesting on the beach at Galathea Bay, the very moment the NGT was stating that Galathea is not a CRZ-1A site. This despite the well-known fact that four species of sea turtles nest here, that the bay is home to more than 20,000 coral colonies, has luxuriant mangroves and is also a prominent nesting site of the Nicobar megapode. What use one might ask of all the money, time and effort put into doing ecological research on the one hand and of having any laws at all on the other? What we have seen in the case of Great Nicobar is as much a mockery of the idea of scientific knowledge as it is of evidence-based law and policy making, indeed of legal jurisprudence.

There is also a much larger question here of the coastline of India, one of the most dynamic, sensitive and important ecosystems, and perhaps one that is most violated, certainly

the most ignored. Millions of people live along the coast that supports huge ecological diversity just as it does the livelihoods of these millions.

A recent re-assessment has increased the Indian coastal length by nearly 50% - from 7,500 km to more than 11,000 km now. More than a fourth of this (3000+ km) is to be seen in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands alone even though the islands constitute a minuscule part of the area of the country. The implications of this are significant - for a system like these islands, the sea and the coast are perhaps more important than the landmass they constitute.

The edge takes on a completely different meaning and salience here. We have a much larger responsibility to this ecosystem and that needs a fundamental shift in our approach to what we do here and what development means in this context.

What we see in Great Nicobar is exactly the opposite. It is the perfect exemplar of an approach and attitude that says 'we couldn't care less!'



NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES

ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

NGT refuses to interfere with EC for Great Nicobar project; cites strategic importance

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has refused to interfere with the 2022 environmental clearance (EC) for the Great Nicobar Island mega infrastructure project. In its order of 16 February 2026, the NGT said

that “considering the strategic importance of the Project [sic],” it found no “good ground” to interfere with the project’s EC, which was granted in 2022. The NGT pronounced its order after reserving its judgement for several months. It accepted the findings of a court-appointed committee, which found no flaws in the clearance process even as legal disputes were raised over coastal violations, the impact on marine life, and insufficient data to back the clearance.

Petitions challenging the project’s EC had been filed by the Mumbai-based Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT) and environmental activist Ashish Kothari in 2022. The NGT, in those proceedings, had cleared the project but noted “certain unanswered deficiencies” in the EC. It then ordered a high-powered committee (HPC) to be constituted to “revisit” the EC with terms of reference (ToRs) concerned with the following issues:

1. an incomplete translocation plan for corals;
2. the use of only one season’s data to support the clearance;
3. seven sq. km of the project fell into CRZ 1A areas, which are zones that prohibit development activity due to the presence of coral reefs, mangroves, and nesting grounds for birds and turtles.

The ToRs were objected to as being too narrow. A prominent conflict of interest was also pointed out in that members of the HPC were from the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, NITI Aayog, and the Ministry of Shipping, all of whom have either expressed support for the project or granted it clearances.

While the HPC’s report was never made public, citing national security reasons, it claimed there were no shortcomings in the EC. The HPC accepted the conclusions of a ground-truthing exercise by the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management, which denied that the project fell into CRZ 1A areas, despite CRZ maps drawn up by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The National Marine Turtle Action Plan also marks the area

as falling under CRZ 1A for hosting a well-known leatherback sea turtle nesting site.

The HPC also agreed with the Zoological Survey of India, which said there were no ‘coral reefs’ in the proposed site for the port, and that the scattered corals found in the area could be “easily” translocated. Multi-seasonal data were not required as there was no evidence of coastal erosion on the island, the HPC further said.

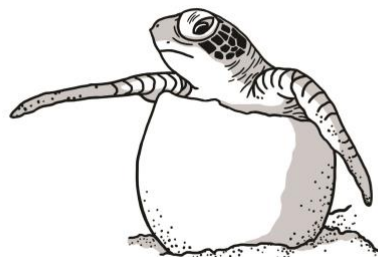
The NGT, in its order, accepted all the HPC’s findings and disagreed that the ToR for the HPC were too limiting.

Ongoing cases in the Calcutta High Court and the Eastern Zone Bench of the NGT challenge the “in principle” forest clearance awarded to the project, as well as claims that rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, were duly settled. The government has maintained that all processes have been followed, and that consent from tribal leaders was obtained before granting EC to the project.

However, in January this year, tribal leaders from the Nicobarese tribe said that they were being pressured to surrender their ancestral land in support of the project. The leaders also alleged their rights under the FRA had not been settled.

(Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXXII, No. 1, Vol. XXXI, No. 3; Vol. XXX, No. 5, Vol. XXVIII, No. 6, Vol. XXVIII, Nos. 5 & 4 and Vol. XXVII, No. 1).

Source: Simrin Sirur. ‘Green tribunal rules in favour of Great Nicobar Island project, citing ‘adequate safeguards’’, www.india.mongabay.com, 17/02/2026.



Record leatherback nesting at Galathea Bay

Photographs and reports from March 2026 reveal that at least a 1000 nestings of the Giant leatherback turtle occurred on the Galathea Bay beach in Great Nicobar Island for the 2025-26 nesting season. The beach is part of the Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) that was denotified in 2021 to facilitate the construction of a transshipment port here as part of the Great Nicobar mega infrastructure project.

The nesting is also significant given the 16 February 2026 order of the National Green Tribunal (see accompanying story) dismissing challenges to the construction of a mega-infrastructure project on the island and asserting that no part of the project site is a CRZ-1A area. CRZ-1A is a category of coastal land that has maximum protection under law on account of its ecological importance – determined by the presence of marine turtle nesting beaches, ground-nesting birds, mangroves and coral reefs, among others. Major development projects are explicitly not allowed in such areas.

While leatherbacks in general are listed as 'Vulnerable' by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, particular sub-populations like in the Pacific for example, are considered 'Critically Endangered'. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have some of the most important nesting sites of the leatherback in the northern Indian Ocean, with the Galathea Bay being the most important and prominent one.

Table 1: Nesting records of sea turtles at Galathea Bay

	2022	2023	2024
Leatherback	649	505	617
Olive Ridley	31	48	23

Source: RTI reply from the A&N Forest Dept

Table 2: Leather back nesting at Galathea Bay (1991-92 to 2018-19)

Year	Nos.
1991-92	158
2000-01	524
2015-16	412
2016-17	90
2017-18	182
2018-19	203

Source: Wildlife Institute of India report

Source: 'Great Nicobar Island: Galathea Bay sees record turtle nesting, contradicting NGT stance', Pankaj Sekhsaria, www.scroll.in, 30/03/2026.

ASSAM

Kaziranga NP&TR supports thriving population of fishing cat: Study



A recent study has revealed the presence of a thriving population of the fishing cat

(*Prionailurus viverrinus*) across the wetlands of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNP&TR). The report was launched during Fishing Cat Day celebrations in Kaziranga on 22 February 2026.

The Tiger Cell of Kaziranga, in collaboration with Tiasa Adhya, a scientist on a Fishing Cat Project, assessed the camera-trap images available from the past all-India tiger estimation data. They identified a total of 57 unique individuals across 450+ sq. km, indicating a healthy, reproducing population widely distributed across the landscape.

The statement, issued on February 22, said, "The study, which largely relied on by-catch data, arrived at this number, which is likely to be an undercount, as the data is based on camera trap grid size placed for tigers.

However, it also provides a good methodology for setting up baseline studies for lesser-known species...”

The fishing cat is one of the few felids adapted for aquatic hunting. It is a globally 'Vulnerable' species and faces threats from habitat loss and hunting, with disappearances noted in Vietnam and Java. South Asia holds its global core population, tied to lowland river basin wetlands. It is protected under Schedule I of India's Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Source: Rajat Ghai. 'Assam's Kaziranga is a stronghold of the endangered fishing cat as first scientific assessment finds thriving population', www.downtoearth.org.in, 24/02/2026.

Rise in tiger population in Assam; many deaths already in 2026



Assam's tiger population has recorded a sharp rise over the past decade and a half, with the number of big cats in the state reaching 227 in

2022 from 70 in 2026. However, the positive trend has been tempered by a series of tiger deaths reported this year.

In just the first two months of 2026, four tiger carcasses were recovered from Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNP&TR). The most recent case was reported on February 7, when park personnel discovered the carcass of a male tiger in the western side of the Mandir Baneshwar Anti-Poaching Camp (APC) area under the Burapahar Range at Ghorakati. Earlier, an adult female was found dead in the Bagori Range; a young male tiger, estimated to be between two and three years old, was recovered from the Eastern Range at Gamiri and another tiger death was reported from the Bagori Range on January 18.

Experts have warned that rising tiger numbers in confined habitats can heighten territorial conflict. According to the latest official data from the reserve, there were 148 adult tigers in 2024, with a density of 18 tigers per 100 sq. km.

Responding to concerns over the recovery of four tiger carcasses this year, wildlife biologist K. Ullas Karanth noted that tiger mortality is often under-detected in forest environments. Firoz Ahmed of the Assam-based NGO, Aaranyak, also noted that the actual number may be higher, as some dead tigers may go unnoticed and eventually decompose in the forest.

In a statement on February 7, after the carcass of the fourth tiger was discovered, Kaziranga officials said that preliminary findings during the post-mortem suggest that infighting was the cause of the death. Post-mortems and investigations suggested infighting was the reason for the other three deaths as well. Experts believe that infighting among tigers is a natural ecological process driven primarily by territorial overlap or limited space. They have emphasised that restricted dispersal opportunities are a major contributing factor behind such conflicts.

While nearby landscapes such as the Karbi Anglong Hills offer potential habitat, they currently support fewer prey animals and can accommodate only a limited number of tigers. As a result, many tigers remain confined within Kaziranga's core zones, intensifying territorial competition and increasing the likelihood of violent encounters.

Source: Himadri Kalita. 'Tiger deaths in Kaziranga: What infighting reveals about habitat strain', www.assamtribune.com, 22/02/2026.

New grass lizard discovered in Ultapani forests of Manas landscape

Researchers have discovered a new species of Asian grass lizard from Assam's Manas landscape. The species, named *Takydromus*

ultapanensis, was found in the Ultapani Reserve Forest (RF) in Kokrajhar district and formally described in the journal *Zootaxa*. The discovery was made by a team led by Basundhara Chettri of Sikkim University and used detailed morphological analysis with modern genetic sequencing to confirm that the lizard is distinct from its closest relatives.

Unlike many of its congeners found in montane or subtropical habitats, *T. ultapanensis* inhabits lowland, semi-evergreen forests interspersed with waterlogged grasslands and fern patches in the Manas landscape. Researchers recorded the lizards basking on fern bushes in small open patches criss-crossed by seasonal water channels. The species appears to be highly localised. So far, it has only been recorded from the Ultapani RF, making it geographically isolated from other grass lizards in the region.

DNA analysis revealed significant genetic divergence between *T. ultapanensis* and other Indian and Southeast Asian members of the genus *Takydromus*. The genetic distance in key mitochondrial genes confirms that this is not just a regional variant but a distinct evolutionary lineage. Morphologically, the new species also differs from its northeastern Indian relatives — including *T. khasiensis* and *T. sikkimensis* - in scale patterns, body proportions, and diagnostic head features.

With this discovery, the number of *Takydromus* species reported from northeast India rises to five. The study also highlights how the Brahmaputra River and associated ecological barriers may be driving speciation in the region by isolating populations. Researchers note that despite decades of exploration, northeast India continues to yield new reptile species, suggesting that its biodiversity remains under-documented.

The discovery reinforces Manas' status as a cradle of lesser-known yet evolutionarily significant species, along with its flagship tiger reserve status. The fact that *T. ultapanensis* is currently known from a single forest range raises conservation concerns. Its habitat, characterised by submerged vegetation

and seasonal flooding, is ecologically distinct from other grass lizard habitats in the region.

The authors emphasise that more extensive surveys across northeast India and neighbouring countries are needed to fully understand the evolutionary history and conservation needs of the genus.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'New grass lizard species discovered in Assam's Manas landscape', www.nenow.in, 04/03/2026.

CHHATTISGARH

State FD directs officials to use “social ostracisation” to curb wildlife offences

The Chhattisgarh Forest Department (FD) has directed officials to use “social ostracisation” as a frontline strategy to curb wildlife offences in the state. Internal documents from a high-level review meeting reveal a directive for the same issued by Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Arun Kumar Pandey.

Divisional Forest Officers (DFOs) have been asked to collaborate with village heads, religious leaders, local organisations and social influencers to socially exclude individuals who are caught setting traps or engaging in wildlife crimes. The directive also proposes the public display of names, evidence and photographs of alleged offenders in village squares to shame perpetrators. Forest officers have further been instructed to maintain and regularly update a detailed database of known offenders and suspects within their jurisdictions to enable close monitoring and prompt action. This, the FD says, will deter illegal hunting and strengthen the protection of forest areas.

The directive has however drawn significant legal scrutiny and public criticism. Critics argue that social boycott, involving exclusion from community, economic and cultural life, undermines the rule of law and violates constitutional protections, raising serious concerns about due process and

fundamental rights. “Social ostracisation is an inhuman practice. Disconnecting an individual from their community amounts to endorsing a form of ‘civil death’ and bypasses the judiciary. Punishment must be administered by law, not through state-sponsored mob action that strips a person of their basic social existence,” said Dr. Dinesh Mishra, an ophthalmologist who campaigns against the practice of social boycott.

A formal complaint lodged alleges that the FD is resorting to extra-judicial measures to mask shortcomings in its investigation and enforcement.

Source: Ejaz Kaiser. ‘Chhattisgarh forest department’s ‘social boycott’ plan to curb wildlife crime sparks legal and human rights debate’, www.newindianexpress.com, 14/02/2026.

Camera traps confirm presence of tigers with cubs in Boramdev WLS

Camera traps installed by the forest department in Boramdev Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), located in Kabirdham district, have captured clear images of tigers, tigresses and cubs. The divisional forest officer (DFO) informed that more than four tigers and tigresses are active across different forest ranges in the district. Recent tiger movement has been recorded in Prabhu Jhol, Chilfi, Benda, Jhalmala, Jamunpani, the inner areas of Boramdev WLS, and along the Bandha-Bariyal–Jamunpani route. Continuous monitoring is underway through camera traps and ground patrols.

Wildlife experts attribute the renewed tiger presence to increasing population pressure in Kanha National Park in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. As Kanha reaches saturation, tigers are dispersing towards less disturbed, dense forest landscapes like Boramdev, they said. Earlier, tigresses were known to visit Boramdev WLS mainly for breeding, and they used to return after

delivering cubs. This time, tigresses are staying for longer periods along with their cubs.

With tiger presence increasing, the FD has fast-tracked plans to launch a jungle safari in the Boramdev WLS. A Gujarat-based agency has been awarded the contract to operate the safari through a committee. Officials say the safari will boost eco-tourism and local employment, providing livelihoods to local youth while offering tourists a chance to view tigers in their natural habitat.

Source: ‘Multiple Tigers Spotted In Chhattisgarh’s Boramdev, Jungle Safari Likely By April-May’, www.etvbharat.com, 02/02/2026.

KARNATAKA

Malekudiya community conducts meeting in Kudremukh NP; demands implementation of FRA

A gathering of the Malekudiya community living within the Kudremukh National Park (NP), held at Kuthlur in December 2025, has urged the government to provide separate political representation for Malekudiyas in *gram panchayats*. The meeting called for measures to protect the community’s rituals, cultural practices and nature-worship traditions. It also said the government should consult the Adivasi Hakkugala Samanvaya Samiti before taking any decisions related to Malekudiya-inhabited areas or the community.

The gathering resolved that the Forest Rights Act, 2006 (FRA), must be effectively implemented in Karnataka. The community demanded that individual and community rights over forest produce collection be granted to Malekudiya families; that the eviction of Malekudiyas from forests under the pretext of tiger conservation projects or other wildlife-related schemes should be stopped; and harassment of the community by revenue and forest officials should be immediately halted. The community’s other demands include:

- a ban on mining, resorts, industries, large development projects, biodiversity centres and NGO-run study centres in the Kudremukh NP area
- a ban on releasing animals and reptiles captured from urban areas or forest fringes into populated hill regions
- electrification of all Malekudiya homes, development of roads, and reconstruction of collapsed bridges in tribal areas
- the immediate release and rehabilitation of Malekudiya activists who have surrendered to the government
- compensation and livelihood support for families of Malekudiyas killed in police firing
- quality education through improved residential schools, special reservations in higher education, and adequate healthcare facilities in Malekudiya areas and
- strict implementation of employment reservations in both government and private sectors.

Source: 'Malekudiyas seek separate representation in GPs', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 26/12/2025.

Tribal communities of Nagarahole NP oppose the International Big Cat Alliance meeting

A federation of tribal *gram sabhas* in Nagarahole National Park (NP) opposed the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) meeting that took place in Bandipur in February (see story in International News section), alleging that conservation policies have led to decades of displacement and denial of rights for indigenous communities.

The Nagarahole Adivasi Jammapale Hakku Sthapana Samiti (NAJHSS), which represents Jenu Kuruba, Betta Kuruba, Paniya and Yerava communities, said in a press statement that its members had lived in and protected the forests long before they were declared protected areas. It urged visiting

delegates to "conduct themselves with dignity and respect" in what it described as "indigenous territory".

The federation further accused the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and international conservation groups of promoting exclusionary policies. It named organisations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) among those who influence conservation practices in India.

According to the statement, since the launch of Project Tiger in 1973 and the formation of the NTCA in 2005, indigenous communities across India have faced evictions from TRs. It alleged that relocations have often been presented as voluntary while communities experienced pressure to move. The NAJHSS also referred to a directive issued by the NTCA on June 19, 2023, stating that it has raised concerns among indigenous groups, but has not been clarified despite protests.

Tracing the history of forest notifications in the region, the NAJHSS said that the area was declared a reserved forest in the 1870s, a game sanctuary in 1955, was renamed Rajiv Gandhi National Park in the 1980s, and finally designated a TR in 2007. It alleged that these changes were made without obtaining free, prior and informed consent of *gram sabhas*, as required under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996.

Following a 13-day foot march across villages in the Nagarahole region between 21 December 2025 and 02 January 2026, the NAJHSS said that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination wrote to the Government of India on 19 January 2026, highlighting concerns over alleged human rights violations in TRs.

Source: 'Forests Our Ancestral Lands': Tribals Protest PM Modi-Led International Big Cats Meet In Karnataka', www.etvbharat.com, 13/02/2026.

State FD commissions carrying capacity study of Bandipur TR



The Karnataka Forest Department (FD) has commissioned a report on the carrying capacity of the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR). The state forest minister Eshwar Khandre said that though tiger numbers had increased, the forest area had shrunk. The tiger count in the reserve has increased from 12 in 1972 to 150 when a survey was conducted three years ago. Now, the number has risen to 175.

Khandre highlighted the recent spike in tiger attacks in villages on the fringes of the TR; three people were reportedly mauled to death within 15 days in November 2025. The reserve has a circumference of 314 km, of which a 100-km stretch is a conflict zone. The FD has set up 25 anti-poaching camps to patrol the conflict zone.

The minister was responding to queries by Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka regarding the FD closing safaris in the TRs following the attacks. Demands by farmer groups also played a role in the FD stopping safaris from November 2025 to February 2026, said the minister. The government has now decided to use 35 per cent of the revenue generated from the safaris to improve basic facilities and generate employment in hamlets located close to the forests, the minister added.

Source: 'Wary of rising tiger numbers, Karnataka to study Bandipur reserve's carrying capacity', www.indianexpress.com, 12/03/2026.

Coffee Board proposes study to mitigate human-elephant conflict in coffee plantations

The Coffee Board of India, primarily known for coffee research, has proposed a scientific study to develop preventive measures to mitigate human-elephant conflict in coffee plantations across Chikkamagaluru, Kodagu and Hassan districts in Karnataka. The study aims to closely examine elephant behaviour, conflict patterns, methods used to drive elephants back into forest areas, and the effectiveness of existing mitigation strategies.

The Board has sought cooperation from the state government and the forest department (FD). It also plans to approach neighbouring Kerala to seek support for preparing a comprehensive report with recommendations. A task force will be set up under the leadership of Surendra Varma, a senior scientist specialising in Asian elephant research and conservation, who has over two decades of experience working with elephants. Scientists, coffee planters' associations, FD officials and growers will work together on the project. The research will involve digital monitoring, field visits and other scientific methods. Two students will also be included as part of the research team.

The Board has discussed the proposal with senior FD officials, including the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (wildlife).

At present, there is limited clarity on the specific roles of the state government, the

Union government and the FD in addressing the issue.

The proposed study is expected to clearly define the responsibilities of these institutions while also recognising the role of the public,



coffee planters, associations and most importantly, plantation labourers — who are often the worst affected.

Source: Ranjith Kandya. 'Coffee Board plans scientific study to mitigate elephant conflict',
www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com,
25/03/2026.

MADHYA PRADESH

Nauradehi WLS in Veerangana Durgavati TR to be 3rd cheetah home in India: CM



The Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve (VDTR) will become the third home for cheetahs in India, the state's chief minister (CM), Dr Mohan Yadav, announced on March 10, earlier this year.

The CM's announcement came a day after India's cheetah count crossed the half-century mark with the birth of five cubs to eight-year-old Namibian cheetah Jwala aka Siyaya. This was her third successful litter since March 2023. With this, the total cheetah count in the country touched 53, including 20 adults from Namibia, South Africa and Botswana and 33 Indian-born cubs of Namibian and South African adults.

Kuno National Park (NP) in Sheopur district became the first home to 20 Namibian and South African cheetahs in India in 2022-23, while a group of South African cheetahs was shifted to Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Mandsaur district, making it the second home to cheetahs in April 2025. While 17 adults and 33 cubs are housed in Kuno, three South African cheetahs are housed in Gandhi Sagar. The two PAs are near the

Rajasthan border, while the TR is spread over a 2339 sq. km area in Sagar, Damoh and Narsinghpur districts of the Bundelkhand region.

Making the tiger reserve the third home of cheetahs in India is particularly challenging as the cheetahs will have two co-predators, leopards and tigers, here. While the cheetahs already have leopards as co-predators in Kuno, for the first time they will have tigers as co-predators. The estimated tiger population, including cubs here, stands at around 25-28. The TR management is reported to have been racing against time to welcome the cheetahs there; a soft-release boma is being built in a 4.5 sq. km area in Mohali Range of Nauradehi WLS within the reserve.

Back in 2010, after assessing ten sites from seven landscapes in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) had identified the Nauradehi WLS, which was made part of the VDTR in 2023, among the three sites to introduce cheetahs in India (see *PA Updates* Vol. XXXI, No. 3; Vol. XXX, No. 3 and Vol. XXIX, Nos. 5 & 4).

WII and WTI had stated that the Nauradehi WLS was considered favourable for a reintroduction of cheetahs, particularly based on then-existing prey densities, which were enough to support 25 cheetahs. The report had recommended the designation of 750 km as a core area of the sanctuary and relocation of about 23 human settlements from the core with adequate compensation. The relocation of human settlements could then support over 50 cheetahs as a source population, while the Nauradehi landscape could harbour over 70 individuals.

Source: 'Madhya Pradesh's largest tiger reserve to become third home of cheetahs in India in two months',
www.newindianexpress.com,
10/03/2026.

Translocated Bandhavgarh TR tigress poisoned in Chhindwara; five arrested for retaliatory killing

A radio-collared tigress translocated from the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (TR) into the Satpura landscape in December 2024 was recently found poisoned and buried in a pit in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district. A case has been registered against the five accused under the Wildlife Protection Act. All five have been arrested and produced before the court. Officials reported that the tigress had moved beyond the protected forest limits and established territory in a human-dominated fringe, a pattern increasingly observed as tiger populations expand.

Its carcass was recovered in the last week of March from the Sanga Kheda range under the South Chhindwara Forest Division after a search operation triggered by the animal's last known collar location. The operation involving Satpura TR buffer staff and local forest personnel first led to the discovery of a partially eaten ox carcass in a forest patch on revenue land near compartments P-266 and P-262 of Chhatiaam beat. Suspecting poisoning, officials expanded the search with a dog squad and located the tiger's body buried nearby. A senior wildlife official said that the post-mortem has confirmed death due to poisoning.

Investigators say the killing was an act of retaliation. The owner of the ox, a 50-year-old resident of Chhatiaam village, allegedly laced the carcass with pesticide after the animal was killed by the tiger. The poisoned bait was then left in the open, leading to the tigress's death. He later allegedly buried the carcass with the help of others to conceal the crime.

Based on his confession, three more villagers from Chhindwara and neighbouring Narmadapuram district were arrested. Police have indicated a fifth arrest, with officials also probing links between some of the accused and illegal opium cultivation in the region. Senior forest officials said all body parts of the tigress

were found intact, ruling out immediate evidence of trade-linked poaching, though interrogation is ongoing to verify whether there was any larger conspiracy or prior planning. The exact toxic substance used is also being examined. The killing adds to a troubling trend. At least 14 tiger deaths have been reported in Madhya Pradesh since January this year, highlighting the growing friction between expanding tiger populations and communities living along forest edges, where livestock depredation often triggers retaliatory attacks.

Source: Anand Mohan J. 'Translocated Bandhavgarh tigress poisoned and buried in MP's Chhindwara; five arrested for retaliatory killing', www.indianexpress.com, 29/03/2026.

MAHARASHTRA

NTCA sanctions Rs 5 crore for FY 2025-26 for managing human-tiger conflict outside TRs

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has sanctioned Rs. 5.40 cr for the 2025-26 financial year under a special project to tackle rising human-tiger conflict outside designated tiger reserves (TRs) in Maharashtra. The project titled 'Management of Tigers Outside Tiger Reserves (TOTR): Strategies to deal with human-tiger conflict', marks the first time the NTCA has earmarked specific financial support for tigers in areas outside TRs in the state. The funds are expected to support quicker response to conflict situations, improve monitoring of tiger movement outside TRs and strengthen coordination between divisions in managing stray or dispersing tigers.

The approval, issued on February 10, covers six forest divisions — Chandrapur, Brahmapuri, Central Chanda, Nagpur, Pandharkawda and Wadsa — with Rs. 90 lakh allocated to each division. The funds were sanctioned under the National Compensatory

Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) framework.

The annual plan of operation for the six divisions provides for the setting up and strengthening of rapid response teams, procurement of rescue and immobilisation equipment, camera traps and early warning systems. It also includes drones, GPS units, wireless networks, vehicles for response teams, GIS-based monitoring support and capacity building of frontline staff and local volunteers. (Also see *PA Updates* Vol. XXXI, Nos. 4 & 2).

Source: 'NTCA clears funds for managing tigers outside reserves in Maha', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 14/02/2026.

MIZORAM & ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Two new species of keelback snake recorded in PAs in Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh



Scientists from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have reported the presence of two rare keelback snakes, the Rakhine Keelback (*Herpetoreas davidi*) in Ngengpui Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS), Mizoram and the Kachin Hills Keelback (*Hebius gilhodesi*) in Namdapha National Park (NP) and Kamlang Tiger Reserve. Both species were believed to exist only in neighbouring Myanmar.

Researchers say the discovery highlights the ecological continuity between India's northeast and Southeast Asia. The dense forests of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh form part of a larger biodiversity

hotspot that extends into Myanmar, allowing species to move across borders unnoticed.

Keelback snakes are typically non-venomous and are often found near water bodies such as streams and wetlands. Their presence is considered an indicator of healthy ecosystems, particularly in forested and riparian habitats. One of the most distinctive features of keelback snakes is their "keeled" scales. Each scale has a raised ridge running down its centre, giving the snake's skin a noticeably rough and textured feel. This sets them apart from many other snakes, which typically have smooth, glossy scales. The keeled surface not only gives keelbacks a more rugged appearance but also helps them camouflage.

The discovery also reinforces the importance of protected areas such as Ngengpui WLS and Namdapha NP. Namdapha, in particular, hosts a wide range of flora and fauna due to its varied altitudes and climates.

Source: 'Two never-before-seen snakes discovered in India with rare body feature', www.indiatoday.in, 27/03/2026.

RAJASTHAN

Biological park with animal rescue centre and vet hospital to be set up in Alwar

A biological park with a state-of-the-art animal rescue centre and a modern veterinary hospital will be built on a 100-ha site in the Kati Ghati region of Alwar. 30 per cent of this will be developed as a zoo housing various wild animals while the remaining 70 per cent will be developed as landscaped green space. Tourists will be able to see more than 400 animals of 81 species, including giraffes, tigers, cheetahs, lions and others. A butterfly park will also be developed within the biological park.

The forest department (FD) has prepared a detailed project report (DPR), and work will begin after approval from the Union

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

The park will cover the region from Kati Ghati to Jaisamand. A rescue centre, similar to the one at Gir National Park, will be built here. An FD team has observed the rescue centre at Gir Park, focusing on rescue techniques, community involvement and other aspects that will be adopted in Alwar.

Source: 'Alwar Set To Get Biological Park With 400 Wild Animals, 81 Species', www.etvbharat.com, 21/01/2026.

HC bans safaris, restricts wildlife tourism activities at night in Jawai Leopard CR

The Rajasthan High Court (HC) has barred night safaris and restricted all wildlife tourism activities between 6 AM and 7 PM in the Jawai Leopard Conservation Reserve (CR) and nearby areas. A division bench of Justice Pushpendra Singh Bhati and Justice Sandeep Shah was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) where the counsel for the petitioner argued that rampant violations, including night safari, artificial lighting and drone surveillance, have caused severe disturbance and stress to wildlife. Such practices, it was submitted, also pose safety risks to tourists and undermine long-term conservation efforts.

The bench ordered an immediate ban on the use of drones, spotlights and other intrusive devices that disturb wildlife, particularly leopards. The court issued interim directions to curb harmful practices, directing authorities to restrain any person found disturbing wildlife and initiate immediate action against erring safari operators, hospitality staff or individuals.

In its order issued in the last week of March, the HC stressed the need for strict regulation of tourism in Jawai, citing concerns over unregulated activities harming its fragile ecosystem. It underscored the constitutional mandate under Article 48A, which obligates the state to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and

wildlife, noting that it is intrinsically linked to the right to life under Article 21.

Highlighting Jawai's ecological significance, the bench observed that the region represents a rare example of harmonious coexistence between humans and wildlife, especially the leopard and the local Rabari community. However, it warned that this delicate balance is under increasing threat from commercialisation and unregulated tourism infrastructure.

Source: 'HC bans night safari at Jawai leopard reserve', www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 27/03/2026.

TAMIL NADU

42 resorts operating illegally in ESZ of Sathyamangalam TR sealed

The Tamil Nadu government has informed the Madras High Court (HC) that 42 illegal resorts operating in the ecologically sensitive zone (ESZ) of the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve (TR) have been locked and sealed. The authorities conducted an inspection in and around the TR and found 53 resorts/farmhouses located within the ESZ. Only 11 of these were found operating with valid permission. The remaining 42 were subsequently sealed.

A petition related to the illegal resorts in the ESZ, filed by Dr R Karpagam of Coimbatore, came up for hearing recently. During the hearing, the submission was made by special government pleader (SGP) T Seenivasan, representing the principal chief conservator of forest and the chief wildlife warden. Advocate SP Chokkalingam, appearing for the petitioner, stated that action has not been taken so far against certain other resorts and an affidavit, in this regard, was filed in the court.

Meanwhile, the court said that the appellate authority concerned shall consider

the appeals of the closed resorts if they file appeals against the lock and seal.

Source: '42 illegal resorts inside Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve sealed, TN tells Madras HC', www.newindianexpress.com, 20/03/2026.

TELANGANA

NHRC directs resolution of forest rights of Chenchu tribe of Nallamala forests

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), on February 25 this year, directed the Nagarkurnool District Collector to resolve the issue of recognition of forest rights (RoFR) *pattas* that have not yet been issued to eight Chenchu tribe families residing in the Nallamala forest even after they were recognised as rightful owners under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. The directive came after a representation was filed by a Telangana-based NGO highlighting the issues faced by the Chenchu community living in Rayaleti Penta hamlet under Vatvarlapally village of Amrabad mandal.

Ten Chenchu families, who have been living in huts and pucca houses built for them by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) in the 1980s in Rayaleti Penta hamlet near the Hyderabad–Srisailem highway, are still awaiting RoFR *pattas* despite being identified as the rightful landholders. Two of these ten families had received their RoFR *pattas* when the Congress was in power in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh with the late Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy as chief minister (CM). The remaining eight Chenchu families were identified as the owners of their lands; however, they are still waiting for *pattas* to be issued.

The families are reported to have briefly migrated to Andhra Pradesh in 2021 to cultivate red chilli crops. The Telangana Forest Department allegedly demolished their huts and cement houses during that time and has

since prevented them from occupying the space. Officials claim the Chenchus, instead of cultivating, have been leasing out their land to people from Achampet and Mannanur.

An imminent threat to the Chenchus is the Rs. 7,500 crore Hyderabad–Srisailem Elevated Corridor Project. This project includes a 62-km four-lane stretch of the National Highway-765 that passes through the Amrabad Tiger Reserve. Several attempts have been made to persuade the tribals to relocate to alternative sites. Non-Chenchu residents of Vatvarlapally and a few Chenchu families living in smaller hamlets have agreed to relocate. However, a majority of the Chenchus are unwilling to leave the Nallamala forest.

Source: 'NHRC directs Nagarkurnool Collector to resolve Chenchus' forest rights issue', www.siasat.com, 05/02/2026.

UTTARAKHAND

Despite NTCA's opposition MoEFCC approves ropeway in Rajaji TR

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) approved the construction of a ropeway in the core zone of Rajaji Tiger Reserve (TR) despite opposition to the idea expressed by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

According to the Uttarakhand Forest Department (FD), the proposed ropeway project connecting Triveni Ghat to Neelkanth Mahadev Mandir in Rishikesh would ease traffic congestion on the road which passes through the forest area, especially during the Kanwar Yatra. The state government proposal states that the temple is about 27 km from Rishikesh and it takes about an hour and a half to reach it. Since the Neelkanth Mahadev temple is surrounded by forest land, any alignment connecting it to Parvati Mata Mandir would have to pass through the forest. Therefore, one cannot avoid using the forest land for development of the ropeway.

Moreover, the revised proposal on the extent of the eco-sensitive zone of the TR is yet to be finalised. During the Kanwar Yatra, lakhs of pilgrims use pathways which pass through the reserve. Pilgrims will prefer the ropeway to the existing pathway for commutation, resulting in less interference with the wildlife in the forests. Further, the ropeway will provide a means to monitor wildlife movement in the reserve, the proposal says.

However, the NTCA said that the ropeway alone would not be sufficient to accommodate the heavy tourist influx to the temple. Consequently, both the roadway and ropeway would likely remain operational, increasing overall human presence and disturbance in the core area. Due to the potential for increased habitat disruption and fragmentation, the project is not recommended for approval, and an alternative alignment and less invasive solutions should be explored, NTCA said in its report.

Source: Aksheev Thakur. ‘Despite apex tiger body's disapproval, wildlife panel clears ropeway project in Rajaji reserve’, www.tribuneindia.com, 23/12/2025.

NATIONAL NEWS

FAC approves forest land diversion for major mining and infrastructure projects

The forest advisory committee (FAC) of the Union environment ministry has recommended in-principle approval for the diversion of forest land for major mining and infrastructure projects.

According to the minutes of the FAC meeting held on February 27, the in-principle approval has been granted to the following projects:

Project	Forest land for diverted (ha)	Forest area/District/ State
Coal block	1000	Madhya Pradesh (MP)
Coal mine	470	MP
Round-the-clock exploratory drilling	--	Assam
Gondbahera Ujheni East underground coal mine (M/s Mahan Energen Ltd.)	469.	Singrauli district, MP
Marwatola-VII coal block (M/s Rama Cement Industries Private Ltd.)	1,063.114	Ghanghuti Forest Range, MP
Kendudihi North iron ore block (M/s Rungta Mines Ltd.)	135.980	Keonjhar Forest Division, Odisha
Shree Jagannath International Airport	27.887	Puri, Odisha

On the Assam drilling approvals, the FAC accepted a request by the state government, submitted on behalf of Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), for amendments to conditions attached to earlier forest clearances for exploratory oil drilling. The request cited the need for continuous drilling — day and night. The FAC approved continuous drilling on the condition that the user agency take all possible measures to minimise noise and that no labour camp be established in the surrounding forest area and that camps if any would be confined to the diverted forest land.

The proposed mine in Singrauli district is expected to cause tensile strain of 2.98 mm/m, meaning a one-metre stretch of surface ground would deform by nearly three millimetres. The FAC recommended that appropriate mitigation measures shall be implemented by the state government at the cost of the user agency, to reduce tensile strain

on the surface. Further, if subsidence exceeds the predicted level, the user agency will be required to pay the net present value — a monetary quantification of the ecological services provided by the diverted forest area — and carry out compensatory afforestation under ministry guidelines.

An independent expert scientific committee note on unconventional gas development and large coal mining has observed that any form of underground coal extraction results in some degree of deformation of the overlying strata — described as mining-induced subsidence — which can range from a few millimetres to significantly higher levels.

The Marwatola-VII coal block project is proposed over a total 1,200 ha area to be operated partly as an open-cast and partly as an underground mine in the Ghanghuti Forest Range. The boundary of the proposed area abuts the Bandhavgarh-Achanakmar wildlife corridor. The underground portion of the mine is expected to cause tensile strain of 4.96 mm/m — nearly five mm of surface deformation per metre. The FAC said that the state government shall implement appropriate mitigation measures.

The FAC deferred its decision on the diversion of 261.53 ha of unclassified forest land for the Attunli Hydro Electric Project (680 MW) on the Talo River in Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh. It has sought a copy of the Central Electricity Authority's approval of the detailed project report, along with an undertaking to adhere to its design and safety provisions and comply with norms prescribed by the National Dam Safety Authority.

Source: Jayashree Nandi. 'FAC recommends in-principle nod to forest land diversion for mining projects', www.hindustantimes.com, 25/03/2026.

Four working groups to review all policy decisions regarding tiger conservation

The Centre has established four working groups to review all policy decisions made over the past five decades regarding tiger conservation. This initiative coincides with the 50th anniversary of Project Tiger. Each of the groups will focus on a different tiger zone: North, South, East, and West. Their role is to analyse past policy decisions related to tiger conservation over the last 50 years and prepare reports that evaluate the current relevance of these policies, identify outdated practices, and recommend new policies for the next 25 years.

The groups will examine region-specific challenges, trends in tiger populations and their prey base, factors driving population changes, the needs of frontline staff and gaps in the implementation of centrally sponsored schemes. The working groups are expected to submit their reports before the 29th NTCA meeting.

Launched in 1973, Project Tiger aimed to protect the animal and its habitat. The project significantly increased the tiger population, created numerous tiger reserves, and enhanced overall ecosystem health and biodiversity conservation. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has overseen the project and has conducted a total of 28 policy meetings to implement various programmes and decisions.

Source: 'Govt forms expert groups for upgrade of 50-year-old Project Tiger scheme', www.newindianexpress.com, 09/02/2026.

India's coastline assessed to be 11098 km

The length of India's coastline of 7516.6 km has been re-assessed and now measures 11098.81 km. The re-assessment was done by the National Hydrographic Office (NHO) in coordination with the Survey of India (SoI) as per the latest terms of reference provided by

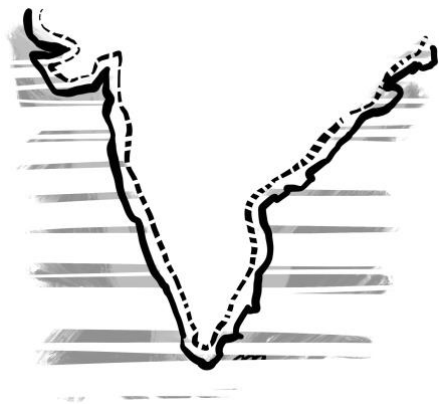
the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS).

The updated measurements were carried out using modern GIS software and high-resolution data of the high-water line (HWL) based on latest surveys thereby capturing more intricate details. Coastal Protection and Development Advisory Committee (CPDAC) accepted the revised coastline length of India after obtaining concurrence from all coastal States/UTs.

Based on the report published by SoI, the revised length of the coastline was promulgated by the Ministry of Ports Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) in a circular dated 29th April 2025.

State / UT	Old Coastline (km)	Revised Coastline (km)
Gujarat	1,214.70	2,340.62
Tamil Nadu	906.9	1,068.69
Andhra Pradesh	973.7	1,053.07
Maharashtra	652.6	877.97
West Bengal	157.5	721.02
Kerala	569.7	600.15
Odisha	476.4	574.71
Karnataka	280	343.3
Goa	160.50	193.95
Daman & Diu		54.38
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1,962.00	3,083.50
Lakshadweep	132	144.8
Puducherry	30.60	42.65
Total (India)	7,516.6	11,098.81

The revised coastline length of 11,098.81 km does not affect areas covered under the CRZ regulations, as CRZ boundaries are determined solely on the basis of the actual high tide line (HTL) demarcated by the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), Chennai.



Source: 'Coastline of India', Press note issues of the Press Information Bureau, Govt of India, 04/12/2025.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

International Big Cats Alliance Summit conducted at Bandipur TR

A three-day international summit of the Big Cats Alliance was held in February at Melukamanahalli in the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (TR). Organised under the Government of India's Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme, the summit was inaugurated by SP Yadav, Director General of the International Big Cats Alliance (DG IBCA). It brought together representatives from countries across the world to discuss conservation strategies and share knowledge on the protection of big cats.

Yadav highlighted how India has taken a leadership role in the conservation and population growth of big cats. He noted that nearly two dozen countries have signed a resolution along with India to protect seven

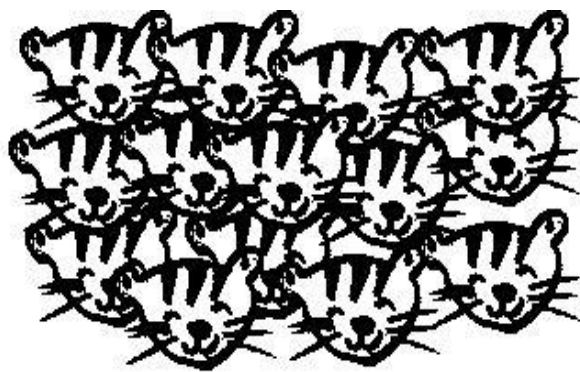
major big cat species: tiger, lion, leopard, snow leopard, jaguar, puma and cheetah. He said that India is well positioned to lead these efforts as nearly 70 per cent of the world's tiger population is in the country, along with about 35 per cent of the global leopard population. Of the seven big cat species identified under the alliance, five are present in India. He also pointed out that the cheetah, which had gone extinct in India, has now been reintroduced and its population is witnessing significant growth.

Countries represented at the summit included Russia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Kenya, Malaysia, Peru, Namibia and Kazakhstan, among others. A total of 39 representatives from 23 countries took part in the discussions.

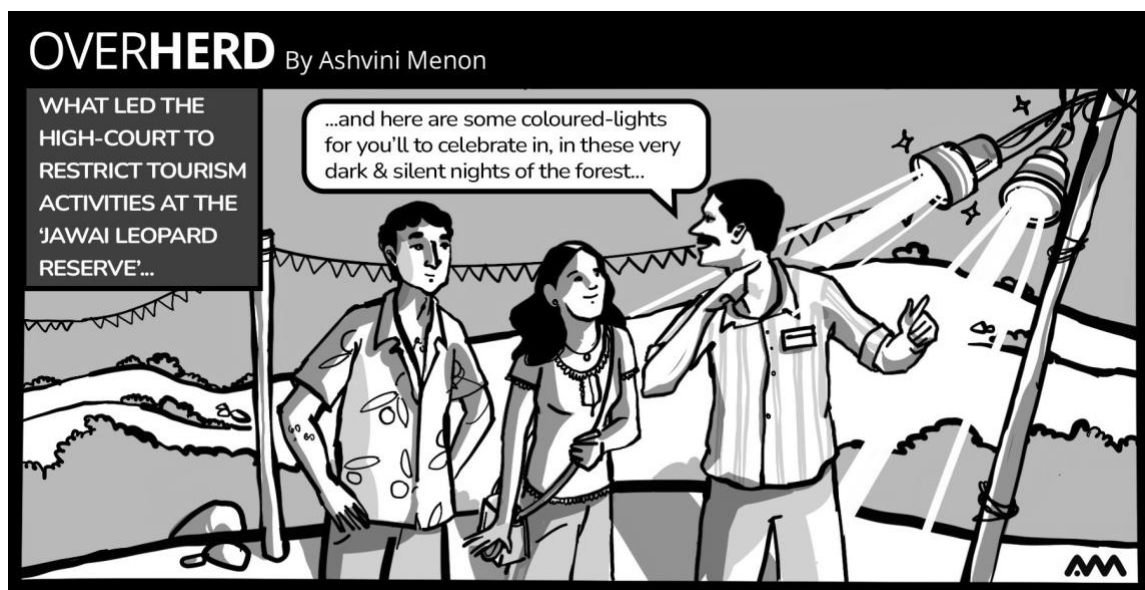
As part of the summit, live demonstrations were conducted for foreign delegates at Melukamanahalli. These included presentations on self-employment initiatives by forest fringe communities using minor forest produce; techniques and equipment used in tranquilising and capturing elephants and other wild animals; forest protection practices; use of drones in wildlife monitoring and patrol

operations; and tools used to prevent human-wildlife conflict.

In a related development tribal communities of the Nagarahole TR staged protests against the meeting alleging violation of tribal rights in the process of conservation (see story in Karnataka section)



Source: 'Bandipur Hosts Global Big Cats Summit As 23 Nations Join Hands To Boost Conservation Efforts', www.etvbharat.com, 10/02/2026.





Dear Readers

The *Protected Area Update (PA Update)*, now in its 32 years of uninterrupted publication faces a serious crisis and needs support.

We've published regularly every two months and put together more than 6000 reports from across the country over this three-decade period. This is a well-organised, easily accessible and usable archive that provides important insights into the discourse of wildlife conservation in India, and how the news media have perceived wildlife, environment, and development issues in the country.



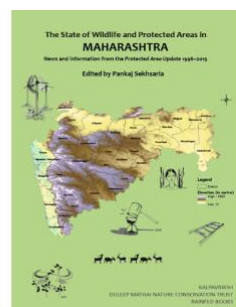
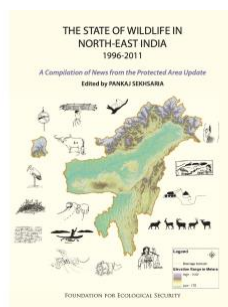
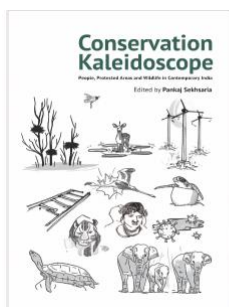
We now face a serious resource crunch, however, and are reaching out to you, our readers and other well-wishers for support. Our annual requirement is Rs. 6 lakhs and at the moment we are scraping the very bottom. We have, as a first step, have to stop bringing out the print version but we are hoping we don't reach that stage.

Please do consider contributing via the google form at the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/53pxe7ce> or scanning the adjoining QR. All contributions, big and small, are welcome. For more information or

for ideas and suggestions of how we can raise resources please do write to the editor at psekhsaria@gmail.com

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THE PROTECTED AREA UPDATE DATABASE

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The *Protected Area Update* team is very happy to announce the creation and publication of the *Protected Area Update Database*, a searchable online resource that archives and brings together nearly 30 years of the news and information published in the *PA Update* since in its beginning in 1994.

The *PA Update*, a 24-page publication in English, provides an overview of what is happening in the field of wildlife protection and conservation in Protected Areas from across South Asia, particularly India. It is published six times a year and mailed to nearly 2000 people including students, teachers, activists, and researchers. Additionally, it

is sent as an electronic version via an email list to about 4500 individuals and is also uploaded on the Kalpavriksh website. The newsletter, in its 31st year of publication, has curated and published 6000+ news reports over the years. This number is constantly increasing with each issue of the newsletter.

The *PA Update Database*, a joint project of Kalpavriksh, the Foundation for Ecological Security, The Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Foundation, The Environment and Ecology Research Group (EERG), at C-TARA, IIT Bombay and the DST, Govt of India supported GISE Hub, IITB Bombay brings together about 4500 of these stories from 300+ protected areas from around the country on one single platform to make it more accessible and user-friendly. It facilitates and hopes to provide important insights into the discourse of wildlife conservation in India, how the news media has perceived wildlife, environment, and development issues in the country over the past three decades.



We hope that this online *PA Update* database will provide a starting point for enquiries into and/or studies on wildlife and media reporting for students, researchers, journalists, activists, and concerned citizens. For further details and feedback please write to pskhsaria@gmail.com

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In Memory
Vijay Mohan Crishna
A quiet supporter of conservation

Vijay Mohan Crishna, a distinguished actor and member of the Godrej Enterprises group passed away on 4th March 2026 at age 80 years in Mumbai. Many people knew him as a cheerful and handsome personality, a versatile actor in English theatre and a supporter of the Sawai Gandharv Mahotsav at Pune. His role in the cult classic film 'Devdas' made him known to the masses. But few will know of his enormous contribution towards biodiversity conservation in India.

In 1992, along with his wife Smita Godrej-Crishna he set up the 'Naoroji Godrej Centre for Plant Conservation and Research' alongside Lawkim Industries in Shirwal. The centre is funded entirely through private and corporate funds. It ensured stable corporate support to scientists and researchers working for the protection of the ecology, especially for the conservation of wild and cultivated plants. The centre actively supports botanists who do basic research in identifying, locating and cultivating endangered as well as economically important species beyond the traditional study of plant classification and nomenclature.

Crishna also played a significant role in strengthening the hands of young scientists like Dr. P. Tetali and helping to translate their conservation vision into action. Every year many young interns join from different parts of India, learn live plant conservation and work on growing rare species.

It has recognition from the Department of Scientific & Industrial Research (DSIR) of the Government of India, as a centre for research on biodiversity & plant conservation with particular emphasis on nurturing and propagating unique plant life of the Western Ghats, and medicinal plants that are of national interest. The attached herbarium is internationally recognized as a repository of specimens from the Western Ghats and it hosts the historically important collection of Prof. M.

Almeida. The entire collection is available digitally and is linked with the Global Biodiversity Information Facility which is consulted by the international research community and is quoted in important works such as IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species. Live collections and the biotechnology laboratory at Shirwal, grassland restoration area and community education centre at Ajnuj are visited by several colleges and schools.

Owing to Crishna's passion for sustainable business, the centre started research and continues to work on the identification of bamboo species, cultivation, product development and training and capacity building of local communities for a nature-based economy. His support also ensured research on mangroves in Mumbai, leading to the designation of Thane Creek as a Ramsar site in 2022.

Through his passing, we have lost a staunch supporter of plant conservation in India. We mourn the loss of a true plant lover and his legacy will continue to inspire future conservationist.

- **Aparna Watve** is a plant ecologist and coordinator, IUCN SSC Western Ghats Plant Specialist Group.

Email: aparnawatve1@gmail.com



MAHARASHTRA

Four arrested in Dombivli, Mumbai, with leopard skin; previous killings in SGNP undetected

The recent arrest of four poachers with a leopard skin in Dombivli has raised concerns in the Forest Department (FD) that illegal wildlife trade could be growing in Mumbai. Investigators learnt that the same poachers had killed another leopard in the same area in Raigad last year and then sold the skin in Mumbai. The fact that this went undetected has the officials worried that poaching and wildlife trade could be thriving on a larger scale in the area.

The Kalyan Crime Branch Unit III along with FD officials arrested four tribal people carrying a leopard skin near Dombivli Railway Station. The four accused hail from villages near Pali, in Raigad district. They were booked under Sections 9, 39, 48 (a), 48 (A), 49(B), 50 and 51 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Police said that during interrogation, one of the accused confessed that they had killed the leopard near Sudhagad fort in Raigad. One of the accused also confessed that they had killed another leopard last year and sold the skin to a Mumbai-based customer. Police tried getting the details but they failed to get information about the buyer.

The case has been handed over to the Vishnu Nagar police station in Dombivli, and the cops and FD officials are now on the look out for the buyer of the first skin. A team of police officials also went to various locations in Raigad to investigate whether more people were involved in the crime.

Source: Ranjeet Jadhav, 'Illegal wildlife trade growing in Mumbai, say authorities', *Mid-Day*, 01/02/16.

Post of Field Director, Navegaon-Nagzira TR vacant for five months

The post of Field Director (FD), Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve (NNTR), has been vacant since September 1, 2015, when Sanjay Thaware retired. The additional charge was given to Gondia Deputy Conservator of Forests (DyCF), Jitendra Ramgaonkar, for two months and is currently being held by the Bhandara DyCF, NR Praveen. It has been pointed out, however, that with a lot of problems being faced by the Bhandara and Gondia divisions themselves, the officers holding additional charge of NNTR cannot be justified.

The government, recently, filled three vacant posts of Assistant Conservator of Forests in NNTR, which had been lying vacant for the past eight months. Four posts of Foresters, a post of Conservator of Forests and another for a Divisional Forest Officer, however, remain to be filled.

The absence of a regular FD is said to have impacted management, protection and conservation activities in the reserve. A senior officer said that there was no coordination between the territorial and wildlife wing, dispersing animals were being poached in the adjoining territorial areas and patrolling too has been limited as the RFOs are busy with *khasra* (tree felling on private land). In the last five years, at least 25 sloth bears have been poached outside NNTR and there is no count of animals like deer, nilgai and wild boars killed similarly. Most of the animal deaths are due to electrocution; however, the forest officials have not yet sought data on power tripping from MSEB officials and neither has the MSEB provided the same on its own.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Navegaon-Nagzira tiger reserve headless for 5 months', *The Times of India*, 05/02/16.

PERSPECTIVE

'Reduce free-ranging prey to manage carnivore population'

Carnivore conservation is one of the most difficult conservation challenges of our time. Take the example of Maharashtra which harbours a rich diversity of carnivores, ranging from the tiny rusty-spotted cat and various canid species (Indian fox, Golden jackal, wolf) to the striped hyena, sloth bear, and the tiger. While the state has done well to conserve these species across six tiger reserves and many wildlife sanctuaries, many occur outside the protected area network. An increase in attacks on humans by tigers, leopards, and sloth bears around Pune, Nashik, and in Vidarbha poses difficult questions around carnivore management.

The standard response has been capturing responsible individuals, leaving tens of leopards and tigers in captivity across the state, while controversial ideas such as chemical castration have been floated and sought initial approvals.

As an ecologist, I understand the difficulty of managing the problem at hand and the need to find solutions that are preemptive and help reduce attacks. However, all efforts seem to be targeting the carnivores in an effort to reduce their populations from outside protected areas without using lethal force. This overlooks one of the fundamental principles in ecology, Volterra's Third Law, also known as the Volterra Principle.

Exactly a hundred years ago, in 1926, Volterra used mathematical equations to demonstrate (among many other things) that predator removal without reduction in prey numbers is not an effective solution to reducing predator populations. Effective reduction in predator numbers can only be achieved if there are simultaneous efforts to reduce prey numbers. The principle also demonstrates that simultaneous (and equivalent) removal of predator and prey will, in effect, lead to a

reduction in predator numbers but not prey numbers.

If one is to apply the Volterra Principle to the problem at hand in Maharashtra, then it is clear that the predator removal programs will not succeed in the long run if they are not accompanied by the removal of prey species, such as free-ranging dogs and free-ranging pigs, from human-dominated areas. Dogs and pigs are primary prey for leopards outside protected areas, while tigers rely on cattle and pigs. Management of these species by reducing their numbers is crucial for the efforts to reduce predator populations to succeed.

The reduction of the dog and pig population will have multiple benefits : not only will this contribute to reducing the population of leopards and tigers outside PAs, but also help reduce the number of cases of dog bites and crop depredation by free-ranging pigs.

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