

Field Visit to Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve regarding recent tigress mortality

Report of the Member Secretary, NTCA

As directed, the undersigned visited the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (MP) on 31st May and 1st June, 2010 to ascertain the factual status regarding the recent mortality of a tigress. The factual status/ observations based on interactions with the CCF and Field Director, staff and wildlife enthusiasts/ tour operators, besides site visit are as below:

1. The tigress was a resident, breeding animal at 'Jhurjhura' (Tala Range) which forms part of the core/ critical tiger habitat.
2. The tigress, alongwith its 3 cubs (around 6 months old) has been intensively photographed/ seen/ monitored by the park management and visitors. The said tigress has also been captured by the research team from the Wildlife Institute of India in its data collection process using camera traps.
3. The tigress was last seen by visitors and photographed on 17-05-2010 during the forenoon, besides sighting by tourists in the evening till 5 PM (Jhurjhura dam)
4. On 18-05-2010 the tigress was not seen in its usual area (Jhurjhura dam).
5. The tigress was used to viewing by visitors and there are no reports of the animal showing any aggressive behavior.
6. The day-to-day record of vehicular entry (tourist vehicles) is maintained by the park management at the main entry point (Tala).
7. It is learnt that 3 Govt. vehicles (2 belonging to the park management and 1 outsourced by the CEO, Zila Panchayat, Umaria) entered the park in the late afternoon on 18-05-2010. Besides, 2 park vehicles also went inside for the routine patrolling works from Tala to Kallwah which did not pass

through the tiger spot. These 2 vehicles did not return back to Tala and stayed at Kallwah.

8. Of the other 3 vehicles, one park vehicle returned back to Tala with the staff from the main gate around 9.30 PM on the same night.
9. The other 2 vehicles indicated at serial no. 7 included the vehicle of Range Officer, Magdhi and an outsourced vehicle used by the CEO, Zila Panchayat, Umaria, who was on an inspection visit relating to works being carried out under NREGA for water impounding at the Magdhi Range.
10. It is reliably learnt from various people that the above 2 vehicles indicated at serial no. 9 stayed beyond the permitted park timings and visited the in-situ enclosure at Baheraha (Magdhi Range) for viewing the tiger cubs housed in the same (which is not permitted). Further, the vehicles also went to the tigress spot at Tala and returned back via Bhadrashila barrier instead of the main gate, which is also a cause of suspicion.

There is a strong indication (emerging out of the detailed interaction with the local people and the Field Director) that the tigress was fatally hit by one of these vehicles. The occupants in both these vehicles included the following persons:

- a) Shri Akshay Kumar Singh, CEO Zila Panchayat, Umaria
- b) Lalit Kumar Pandey, Range Officer, Magdhi
- c) Dr. K.K. Pandey, Veterinary Assistant Surgeon, Tala
- d) A relative of Shri Akshay Kumar Singh and 3 children
- e) Shri Man Singh, Driver of Range Officer, Magdhi
- f) A driver of the vehicle used by the CEO, Umaria.

(It is also learnt that Dr. KK Pandey owns a lodge named 'Tiger Heaven' and wields considerable influence in the area. He was also present in the PM subsequently, and has provided his vehicle to the CEO, Umaria office on a contractual basis/ arrangement. He volunteered for bringing the post

mortem report from Jabalpur, while using the same vehicle provided to the CEO, Zila Panchayat, Umaria.)

11. On 19.05.2010, the tigress was seen in an abnormal/ injured condition by several tourist vehicles and the park staff. The Field Director and the Deputy Director were away on tour to Bhopal during the period for participating in the State Wildlife Advisory Board and other meetings. On learning about the condition of the tigress, the Field Director telephonically instructed for cordoning of the area.
12. The tigress was found dead in the Jhurjhura dam on 19.05.2010 at around 9.20 AM. The PM was carried out the next day after preserving the carcass in a deep freeze by a team of veterinary experts which included Dr. AB Shrivatava, Associate Professor, veterinary college, Jabalpur. The Field Director telephonically apprised the undersigned about the incident. Shri Satyendra Tiwari, wildlife enthusiast and tour operator was suggested from the NTCA to be present alongwith Dr. AB Shrivastava during the PM.
13. The PM has revealed that the tigress has succumbed on account of seivour impact by due to a hard/ blunt object. There were no signs of external injury or bullet wounds. There are enough arguments/ evidences which strongly indicate that the 2 vehicles carrying the CEO, Zila Panchayat Umaria, Range Officer, Magdhi and others as indicated at serial no. 10 was involved in this accident.
14. Since then the State Forest Department has suspended the Asstt. Director, and two Range Officers (RO Magdhi and RO Tala).

In this context, the following urgent actions are suggested:

- I. Advising the State for an urgent **CBI** probe into the whole incident which would, interalia, address the related issues (violation of rules, corruption, nexus, if any, between the lower functionaries of the park and tourist operators etc.)

- II. Advising the State for immediately housing the orphaned tiger cubs in an in-situ enclosure within the park, with the technical advice of the Wildlife Institute of India and the NTCA, with Central Assistance.
- III. Advising the State for strict regulation of tourism in Tiger Reserves vis-à-vis the advisories issued by the MoEF for adhering to the carrying capacity.
- IV. Urging the State Govt. to expedite the notification of buffer zones around the core areas of Tiger Reserves, and according them further statutory protection under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and placing the same under the unified control of respective Field Directors.
- V. Advising the State to address the District Collectors to examine the corridor value of an area before granting permission for a change in its landuse vis-à-vis the State level corridor connectivity identified in the recent all India Tiger estimation.
- VI. Strengthening the hands of the Field Director (who is a dedicated, trained officer with good track record) by posting motivated Deputy Director, Assistant Director and Range Officers, besides filling up the frontline staff vacancies.

Date: 01.06.2010

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