The Hindu New Delhi, 12 May 2024

Activist urges Supreme Court-appointed panel to be transparent on elephant transfers

The Hindu Bureau GUWAHATI

An Assam-based environment activist has sought transparency from a Supreme Court-appointed panel in matters of longdistance movement of elephants and other wild animals.

Rohit Choudhury's letter to retired judge Deepak Verma, the chairperson of the High-Powered Committee set up by the apex court, followed the "arduous journey" of an ailing elephant and her calf from Tripura to Gujarat's Jamnagar, more than 3,000 km away.

The transportation of Pratima, the elephant and her calf "due to a medical



Representational file image. K.K. MUSTAFAH

emergency" was based on an order passed by the committee.

"While I respect the urgency, these two elephants are now among the 100+ captive elephants that have been transferred from the northeast, their natural habitat, to Jamnagar, a dry arid desert," Mr. Choudhury said in his May 9 letter.

He said the northeast has more than 1,000 elephants in captivity. "Despite limitations of infrastructure, we have an established network of wildlife experts, enthusiasts, activists, Forest Department officials, and veterinarians within the region to provide care and treatment to both wild and captive elephants in need," he wrote.

The current transfer was in haste without tapping into the existing networks in the northeast, he wrote.

Genetic mapping

"The HPC has not considered alternate, local options for treatment that would have avoided an arduous journey for a severely unfit elephant who is still nursing her calf," he wrote. "...this transfer is potentially in breach of the Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1972 and also the Captive Elephant (Transfer and Transport) Rules of 2024," he added.

Referring to reports, the activist said the transportation does not seem to suggest that the elephants had valid ownership certificates and genetic mapping, as mandated by the 2024 Transfer Rules, "If the elephant was gifted to the temple trust , as has been the consistent practice with previous elephants sent to Jamnagar, the change of ownership and transfer come under the immediate scrutiny of the 2024 Transfer Rules. And the absence of a valid certificate and genetic mapping renders this transfer egregious despite the medical emergency," he wrote.

The Assam Tribune Guwahati, 12 May 2024

Elephants being poached for meat

Killing of three elephants in Behali this year has been officially acknowledged

SIVASISH THAKUR

BEHALI (Biswanath), May 11: Even as the State's human-elephant conflict continues to hog media limelight, another sinister phenomenon that has taken a heavy toll on elephants is hardly noticed.

A number of elephants have fallen prey to poachers in and around Behali reserve forest (RF) bordering Aru-



Remains of an elephant 2. The second war a light with

nachal Pradesh in Biswanath district of Assam in the past three-four months. Even more disturbing could be the fact that the killings have largely been driven by the demand for elephant meat in Arunachal Pradesh. While the killing of three elephants this year has been officially acknowledged, wildlife activists allege a greater number of fatalities at the hands of

poachers.

During a field visit to Behali RF, this correspondent came across the site where two elephants - a mother and her calf - were killed by poachers one month back. The remains of the elephants were laid to rest in the area.

>> SEE PAGE 10

Elephants being poached ...

(Contd from page 1) "At least four elephants have fallen to poachers in and around the Behali landscape along the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border this year - a trend discernible for the past several years. Even a greater number of the pachyderms get killed on the other side of the border every year. Ivory has been a factor behind elephant poaching, but the demand for meat is probably a bigger factor for which even sub-adult elephants are being killed," several wildlife activists this correspondent talked to asserted.

Elephant meat has been a much-preferred delicacy in many areas of Arunachal Pradesh where the meat is shared among the people in villages as well as sold in the markets. The meat is also sold in smoked and dry varieties.

"Many tribes in Arunachal

as also in other Northeastern states relish elephant meat, which is a definite reason behind the dwindling number of elephants in the region. Due to the laxity of the Assam forest department and the Assam government, poachers from Arunachal enter the Assam side of the contiguous belts of border forests such as Behali with impunity and kill elephants," local community leader Langki Kiling, who is also a village headman and founder member of NGO Nature's Bonyapran, said.

When asked about the recent poaching cases, a forest officer said that investigation into the killings was on. He, however, refused to comment on whether any poacher from Arunachal was involved in the killings.

"There have been earlier instances of elephants killed by poachers from Arunachal side. However, there could be a nexus between poachers from Arunachal with local contacts as well in the latest cases. We are looking into every aspect," he added.

Bihmari, Serelia Bon Gaon, Hatimora, etc., are areas which have witnessed elephant poaching in recent times. "While the mother and calf were killed close to Serelia Bon Gaon, Bihmari and Hatimora areas had also witnessed elephant killing," activist Parikshit Kafley said.

So abysmal is the security scenario inside Behali RF that poachers from Arunachal move around openly with guns and had on several occasions threatened local conservation activists not to venture into the forests.

The Special Task Force (STF) of Assam Police had recovered 15.2 kg of illegally smuggled elephant tusks during an anti-poaching op-

eration near the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border in Dhemaji district on April 10. Earlier in February, the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCC), in a joint operation with the local police, recovered elephant tusks weighing 3.731 kg and arrested a person from Tamulpur district. Last year, several persons were arrested in Assam with elephant tusks and body parts of other animals, including tigers.

Elephant killing aside, poaching of deer for meat has been widespread in Behali where miscreants from both Assam and Arunachal are involved.

Behali, which warrants upgrade to a wildlife sanctuary, suffers from inadequate security. Among the existing manpower, too, a good number are aged and ailing, hence unfit for the rigours of frontline patrolling.

Exhibition at Ravindra Bhawan showcases myriad emotions of motherhood

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bhopal: To commemorate Mother's Day, 'Mamta,' a photography contest and exhibition, was held on Saturday. The event, hosted at Lalit Art Gallery, Ravindra Bhavan, aims to encapsulate the myriad emotions and experiences of motherhood through the lens.

The exhibition will conclude today. With the aim to encapsulate the essence of motherhood, the exhibition featured photographs in various categories such as portrait, maternity, indoor, street photography, newborn, pet parents, and motherhood in wildlife.

The event was inaugura-



Mother of Captain Devashish Sharma, a martyr of the Kargil war, inugurated the event

ted by Nirmala Sharma, mother of Captain Devashish Sharma, a martyr of the Kargil war. After losing her son, Sharma learned ceramic art and has been holding exhibitions for over a decade, with the proceeds from the sale going towards the Indian Army Fund.

This is the second year that the exhibition has been organized by reproductive medicine specialist Dr Priya Bhave Chittawar and photographer Varun Namdev. This year's theme was 'motherhood emotions through the lens'. Special guests at the event included Neelima Kulkarni and Savita Namdev.

The guest of honour, Shibani Ghosh and Mita Wadhwa, who work in the social sector, were also present. They are not just parents to one child but to many, through their work in the social sector.

The exhibition showcases the joys, struggles, and unconditional love that come with being a mother. The photographs on display are a testament to the beauty and strength of motherhood.

The organizers hope that the exhibition will not only celebrate motherhood but also raise awareness about the importance of maternal health and well-being. They believe that through this exhibition, they can encourage more people to appreciate and support mothers in their lives and in society.

The 'Mamta' photography contest received 316 entries, and 133 made it to the jury round. The top three from each of the seven categories celebrate the incredible journey of motherhood.

The Times of India Hyderabad, 12 May 2024 Hyd tops 'City Nature Challenge' for second time

Amisha.Rajani@timesgroup.com

Hyderabad: Hyderabad has once again emerged at the top among over 250 cities across India in the City Nature Challenge spearheaded by WWF (World Wildlife Fund)

In Asia, the city has earned the second spot after Hongkong and globally, the city has secured 13th position for showcasing its commitment to environmental conservation. This is the second time in a row that the city has secured the first stop in India.

Hyderabad recorded 34, 239 observations of 2096 species by 527 observers. In terms of observations, Hyderabad displayed its rich biodiversity, with the Neem (Azadirachta indica) topping the charts with 262 observations, while the In-



dian peafowl (Pavo cristatus) with 206 sightings.

While Hyderabad claimed the top spot nationally, Nanakmatta in Uttarakhand closely followed, highlighting India's diverse ecological landscape. La Paz, Bolivia, Monterrey Mexico and San Antonio earned the first three positions in the world.

•	'City Nature Challenge'
is	a global event
•	Event encourages people

• Event encourages people to upload pictures of flora & fauna on iNaturalist app

Hyderabad recorded
34,239 observations of 2,096
species by 527 observers

 Neem tree topped charts with 262 observations, peafowl with 206 sightings

The event, spanning from April 26 to 29, saw unprecedented enthusiasm from the public, especially during the inaugural series of Nocturnal Walks. These walks, conducted across ecological hotspots provided a unique opportunity for citizens to engage with nature, resulting in numerous fascinating discoveries.

The Times of India Goa, 12 May 2024



"With the nesting season yet to end, the numbers are expected to further increase, perhaps even cross a previously untouched figure," a forest department official told TOI.

The forest department has been a vital performer in this delicate conservation ballet and has kept the ecological actions of citizen volunteers perfectly in step.

Foresters and volunteers also scan beaches that are not the usual nesting grounds. Eggs found in newer locations are relocated to the sanctuaries of Morjim, Mandrem, Galgibaga, and Agonda. This meticulous process ensures the safety of Goa's flippered friends, enhancing their population along the state's coastline, before they set off towards the sea.

As Goa celebrates the upswell in Olive Ridley arrivals, experts are calling for a scientific assessment to understand and sustain the phenomenon.

"One assumption (to explain the spike) could be fewer non-monsoon storm surges compared to what used to occur in Dec and Jan," said programme lead and trustee, Goa Sea Turtle Programme, O.C.E.A.N, Sarita Fernandes.

She said that a converse observation of concern is the decline of Olive Ridley's predators — the shark species across the Arabian Sea region. "Other assumptions include the possible rapid beach ero-

CITIZENS' SHELL OF PROTECTION

"he significance of this record-breaking achievement goes beyond numbers because it underlines the collaboration of communities in the conservation mission.

A silent pact with the sea was made at Morjim in 1995, with a retired Army officer, Captain Gerald Fernandes, forming the vanguard to protect the turtles.

His informal awareness campaign sought to arrest the decline in the livelihoods of unemployed fisherfolk. He drew support not only from the community but also from the local leaders.

In 1998, at the villages of Galgibaga and Agonda, Reverend Father Mariano Proenca started preaching about the virtues of saving the Olive Ridleys. He enlightened the youth of the area about the earth's treasures and offered rewards to those who discovered and shielded turtle nests. These initiatives built the community stamina for a concerted turtle conservation drive.

Recognising the intrinsic link between community participation and conservation success, the Goa forest department initiated efforts with the locals in 1997. Appointed as guardians, the locals stand watch over turtle nests even today, ensuring the safe release of tens of thousands of hatchlings into the sea each year.

Some lucky visitors even had the extraordinary experience of watching hatchlings breaking out of their shells in the stillness of the night and making their journey into the open waters, guided by the moonlight.

UNTOLD STORY OF PARRIKAR AND ROYALS

n 2003, forest department officials told the chief minister at the time, Manohar Parrikar, about the potential plan to set up a large shack on Galgibaga beach, which could disrupt the turtle nesting site.

Parrikar told the officials to bring him a resolution from the panchayat. Local activists and the Galgibaga sarpanch worked together to provide the officials with the resolution. They presented it to Parrikar, who directed them to prepare an official note advocating the acquisition of the entire private area where the nesting site lay. This direc-

serves," DeSouza said. "All of this has paid rich dividends over the years and now we see an increase in turtle nesting."

The beachfront spectacle of turtle nesting in Goa is promising a season of remarkable milestones. Yet, much more is to be achieved.

"A management plan needs to be put in place for each



With no disturbance from shacks, humans or stray dogs, there

velop a turtle conservation centre, a research centre, and other infrastructure, supported by funding from central govt," DeSouza said. "Only if continuous efforts prevail will we continue to see an increase in turtle nesting."

nesting area to de-

Since 2017, the lifesavers of Drishti Marine have done a remarkable job in reporting dead or injured marine animals, including sea turtles. **Conservation efforts are needed** to ensure sea turtles continue to nest on these shores - Puja Mitra | TERRA CONSCIOUS

Varca

Mobor Canaguinim

Agonda

Palolem

Galgibaga

Cavelossim



sion from the turtles natal beaches in the nearby region or the growth of invasive species like certain beach grass and ipomea. These factors may have contributed to the spike in arrivals at Morjim beach," she said.

SAFE SPACE FOR MARINE LIFE

in a nutshell: Among all the coastal states in India, Goa recorded one of the earliest communitybased initiatives in sea turtle conservation, after only Kerala. Of Goa's 120km coastline, about 8km has been identified as a stretch for major nesting sites, which are being protected by the forest department

> Nesting time: **Between Oct** and March

Main

nesting

species:

Olive Ridley

MIRACLE SPECTACLE FOR FOREIGN TOURISTS

etween 2003 and 2009, foreign tourists flocked to Goa to witness first-hand the eternal Olive Ridley circle of life of nesting and voyage.

During this period, the forest department implemented a unique initiative, providing foreign tourists with hammocks at Galgibaga beach, allowing them to lounge under the sun while ensuring the safety of turtle nests beneath their shadow. "It was a time when the

> forest department needed revenue, and these activities helped," said a senior govt official. "Foreign tourists were sensitive to Goa's ecology, which made it easier for us to host

> > them."

Marine wildlife division: It was set up in 2023 mainly for turtle conservation. One of the crucial roles of the marine range is the identification and relocation of turtle eggs from various beaches of Goa to the four prominent nesting sites

tive was sent to the chief conservator of forests.

"To secure the necessary land, we had to take into confidence the royal family of Raja Saundekar of Nagueshi, who once owned large tracts of land at Canacona and Qupem," a senior forest department official said. "We showed him the map, and the portion that we wished to acquire. He said to

us, 'I had heard that we are landowners. I am surprised to learn that my family still owns so much property in Goa.' Yet, he humbly obliged us and let the forest department have the land for turtle conservation."

The department then moved a proposal in 2005 to acquire 16.5ha of land, including a part of Talpona beach.

RARE SIGHTING AT MIRAMAR

In the past decade, the high court has come down heavily on all shacks near nesting sites. Loud music and garish lights disorientate hatchlings. "With no disturbance from shacks, hu-

mans, or stray dogs, there has been an in-



has been an increase in turtle nesting. Even places like Miramar beach and Calangute beach are now able to witness nesting, which was unheard of earlier Richard DeSouza FORMER

PRINCIPAL CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS

changes habitat quality.

conservationist said.

"There is a need to

maintain an audit of

the survival rate.

1,674

"Unless coastal biodiversity is consistent

and marine conservation widespread, turtles

in Goa will continue to be at risk," a marine

2020-21

Though Goa celebrates the nesting triumph today, experts' observations reveal that the death of 40-50 adult turtles is reported annually. These have been attributed to multiple factors such as accidental bycatch due to trawling, pollution leading to infections and diseases, in-

testinal blockage because of plastic ingestion, and climate impact that

5,795

destroyed by a hotel chain that launched its beachfront business illegally on a turtle nesting site at Morjim - Sarita Fernandes | O.C.E.A.N

The forest department needs to step up efforts to save the grown turtles in the sea. An increase in mortalities has been recorded but we have not been able to identify the cause Venkatesh Charloo [**GOA BARRACUDA**

2022-23

Eggs Released

7,277

6,230



2021-22



The Assam Tribune Guwahati, 12 May 2024

YESTERDAY ONCE MORE – Dr. Shiela Bora

Pachyderm trail A chronicle of the rhino's survival.

A prehistoric mammal which has undergone very little change during its evolution, date back to 8000 BC. Historical and hunting references delineate the rhino habitat from Peshawar in Northern India to the eastern grassy plains and swamps extending towards Sadiya and Burma. Depicted in seals and clay models of the Indus Valley Civilisation (2600 to 1900 BC), the

rhino was seen in the lower Indus Valley by Ibn Battuta in 1333 fortunately, the ship carrying the rhino sank, when caught in a storm in the Gulf of Genoa and was immortalised in 1515 on a wood engraving by the German artist, Albrecht Dürer.

While the first Indian rhino sent to the British Isle in 1685 was paraded round the country for two years, a three-year-old rhino brought to Holland a few years later found mention in various literary works for being taken in procession around the continent

> in a carriage drawn by 20 horses. By the 19th century, rhinos were found

AD. Lydekker's book, *The Great and Small Game of India, Burma and Tibet (1900)*, refers to the memoirs of Babur and mentions that young



Humayun, accompanying his father on a hunt near Peshawar, was greatly amused to see a rhino, when it was forced out into the open by elephant mahouts.

Describing the rhino in circa 1030 AD, scholar Al-Biruni said, "The ginda exists in large numbers in India... It is of the build of a buffalo, has a black, scaly skin, a dewlap hanging down under the chin. It has three yellow hooves on each foot... Eyes lie low, further down the cheek... On the top of the nose, there is a single horn which is bent upwards. The Brahmins have the privilege of eating the flesh of the ginda..."

Ulysses, the first Indian rhino gifted from the King of Cambay to King Emmanuel of Portugal, was shipped from Goa to Lisbon on May 20, 1515. On its arrival the unusual animal was examined by scholars and the curious, and letters describing the creature were sent to correspondents throughout Europe. Impressed to see an elephant flee on the sight of the rhino during a fight arranged between the two animals in Lisbon, the King decided to gift the rhino to Pope Leo X. Unin various zoological gardens and menageries of Europe.

Following the disappearance of rhinos from Western India due to relentless

shooting, killing and loss of habitat, their habitat was restricted to Nepal, North Bengal and Assam. With dwindling of the rhino population in Assam almost to a dozen by the turn of the 20th century, the Government initiated protective measures and declared Kaziranga a Reserve Forest in 1908, a Game Sanctuary in 1916 and a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1950. Killing, injuring, or capturing of rhinoceros was made punishable by promulgation of the Assam Rhinoceros Preservation Act of 1954.

Conservation efforts, aided by an exceptional model of protection of forest and of threatened species during the next 60 years under the leadership of forest officials like Prabhakar Barua, the first Assamese Chief Conservator of Forest of erstwhile Assam, brought a steady increase in the rhino population, the crowning glory of the period being the declaration of Kaziranga as a National Park in 1974 and the regaining of the lost rhino population from one dozen in 1908 to about 400 in 1966 and to over 2000 at present.

(The writer is an eminent historian of Assam.)

The Assam Tribune Guwahati, 12 May 2024 Poacher killed at KNP

KAZIRANGA, May 11: A poacher was killed in an encounter with forest guards early morning today at eastern range of Agaratoli of the Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNP).

According to a senior forest official, based on the intelligence inputs received a few days back that a group of poachers numbering four had entered the eastern range of Agaratoli of Kaziranga National Park with the intention of poaching a rhino. Accordingly, the forest guards patrolling in the area encountered the poachers which ensued a gun battle. During the encounter, a poacher was killed and a rifle was recovered along with live ammunitions. - Correspondent

Free Press Journal Mumbai, 12 May 2024 Red alert after leopard attack in Junnar

STAFF REPORTER

Following the fourth attack within two months, the Junnar Forest Division has issued a red alert for 13 villages near the village.

These villages include Gayamukhwadi. Jambhulpad. Navalewadi, Pimpri Pendhar, Umbrai-1 and 2. Yedgaon. Pimpalwadi. Vaishakhkhede, Chalkawadi, Bhatkalwadi, Nagadwadi, and Kandali. The forest department has urged villagers to exercise caution. Residents are advised not to venture outdoors before 9am and after 5pm as a precautionary measure. They have advised residents to travel in groups rather than alone when ven-

Attacks in last two months

May 8: Rudra Mahesh Fatale (8) was fatally attacked by a leopard while playing in Kolwadi, Junnar

April 11: Sanskruti Kuelkar (1.5 years old) killed in a leopard attack in Shiroli Khurd, Junnar

March 11: Another fatal attack reported

turing into fields.

It's recommended to carry a stick and periodically make loud noises by bursting crackers as a deterrent measure. Additionally, residents are cautioned against leaving small children and elderly individuals unattended in farm outskirts and are urged not to sleep in open areas outside the house.

Forest officials reported the third fatal leopard attack in the Junnar forest region of Pune within a month, as a 60year-old woman farmer lost her life in the Pimpri Pendhar area in Junnar on May 10. The deceased has been identified as Nanubai Sitaram Kadale (50). She was working in her bajra farm when she was fatally attacked by a leopard around 8am.

Before that, two individuals have lost their lives, and a woman has sustained severe injuries following a sudden leopard attack within the forest area of Junnar.

In response to the escalating threat, the Junnar Forest Division has taken proactive measures, installing 30 cages and deploying 20 trap cameras to capture leopards in the vicinity. The area is under constant surveillance via drone cameras, and 50 forest employees are actively engaged in spreading awareness among local communities.

Upon receiving reports of incidents, officials from the Junnar Forest Division, in collaboration with the Manikdoh Rescue Team, promptly mobilise to the affected areas to take necessary action.

Hindustan Times New Delhi, 12 May 2024 Rhino poacher killed in gunfight at Kaziranga park, say forest officials

Biswa Kalyan Purkayastha

letters@hindustantimes.com

SILCHAR: A suspected rhino poacher died after a gunfight with forest guards in Assam's Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve in the wee hours of Saturday, officials said.

A cache of firearms, including 303 rifles, live bullets, around 2,000 cartridges and other weapons were recovered later, which showed the poachers were planning for a massive poaching drive in the park, the officials said, seeking anonymity.

Officials of the Kaziranga park received intelligence inputs about this a few days ago and were prepared for a fight. "Our armed team along with police and other security forces were keeping vigil on POLICE SAID THEY HAVE RECOVERED A CACHE OF FIREARMS AND OTHER WEAPONS THAT SHOWED THE POACHERS WERE PLANNING A MAJOR POACHING DRIVE IN THE PARK

those areas where the poachers generally make attempts," an official said.

A team of poachers entered the park on Thursday by crossing the Brahmaputra river and stayed in the forest in the night. "Our guards saw lights inside the forest at night and they tried to catch the poachers when the firing started. The poachers started the firing and our team reciprocated. The suspected poachers fled, leaving one of their injured teammates," the official said.

The forest guards took the injured man to a local hospital, where the doctors declared him dead. Officials are yet to identify the deceased person. "The person was not carrying any document, which can reveal his identity. It is possible that he was from a neighbouring state. We are investigating the matter further," another official said.

Kaziranga park saw several attempts of poaching in the past, which has reduced in recent years. In 2022, the park recorded no poaching.

Last year, a team of poachers made an attempt but were prevented.

Free Press Journal Mumbai, 12 May 2024

Rhino poacher shot dead in Kaziranga National Park

DIGJYOTI LAHKAR / GUWAHATI

Forest personnel guarding the world-famous Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR) foiled an attempt of a group of poachers to sneak into the National Park by killing one poacher on the spot.

The incident took place near Erasuti Anti Poaching Camp under Agaratoli Range in the wee hours of Saturday.

"While one poacher was killed, three of the gang are believed to have taken shelter in the thick forest of the national park. The search operation continued to trace out the entire members of the gang," KNPTR field director Sonali Ghosh said.

"A modified .303 rifle and



the border areas from Eastern Assam Wildlife and Biswanath Wildlife Divisions. In the early morning hours of today, a patrolling party stationed near Erasuti Anti Poaching Camp under Agaratoli Range intercepted a few unknown persons on foot. When challenged a fierce gun battle broke out on both sides," Ghosh also said. "Today morning, the forest guards searched the area and recovered the body of the poacher. A modification.303 rifle and live ammunition were also recovered upon him," Ghosi further said. Currently, the entire area is being combed to trace out any further evidence with the help of Assam Police. "This is the first successful case of preventing crime against wildlife after six years. The last poacher killed to prevent crime was in 2017," Ghosh added.

five live cartridges were also recovered from the slain poacher. The weapon is usually used for poaching of rhinos," Ghosh said.

The body of the slain poacher is yet to be identified.

"Based on intelligence inputs regarding poachers trying to sneak into the National Park, forest personnel have strengthened their patrolling and surveillance activities along its boundary. Yesterday, patrolling and surveillance parties were stationed along

The New Indian Express Chennai, 12 May 2024

Spot the Difference

A comprehensive behind-the-scenes look at the Cheetah reintroduction programme in India



By RAJESH GOPAL

he Return of Chitrakayah by Chandra Prakash Goyal and Satya Prakash Yadav captures the story of bringing the Cheetah from Africa back to our country, and the hard work of the team involved with the initiative. According to the authors, "this endeavour... was a huge risk standing at the precipice of several ecological and socio-economic challenges, least to mention scientific experiments don't have a predetermined outcome". Today, with the birth of several cheetah cubs, India has taken definitive steps to re-establish the animal back to its historic range, in the country's savanna habitats.

Did you know that the word 'cheetah' comes from the Sanskrit term *chitrakayah*? It refers to the animal's spotted coat pattern. The historical range of cheetahs in India encompassed much of the country except the Himalayas, the coastline and the The Return of Chitrakayah By: Chandra Prakash Goyal, Satya Prakash Yadav Publisher: Marshall Advertising Pages: 124 Price: ₹1,250

northeast region. Ancient cave paintings around the Chambal Valley point to their existence well over a thousand years ago. Unfortunately, large-scale capture from the wild to fill the royal menageries for coursing, bounty and sport hunting led to the species' downfall in India. Breeding in captivity was met with little success, and extensive habitat conver-



sion with consequent decline in prey base only added to the woes 18th century onwards, thereby making cheetahs a rare species in the Indian subcontinent by the beginning of the 20th century. That is when Indian royals began to import them from Africa for the love of coursing. In 1947, it is widely believed that the last wild cheetahs in India were shot by Maharaja Ramanuj Pratap Singh Deo of Koriya, now in Chhattisgarh.

The decline, however, was formally acknowledged only in 1952 at the first wildlife board meeting held by the government in Mysuru. Since then, one of independent India's dreams was to bring back the unparalleled grace and speed of the fastest land animal on the planet. In the Anthropocene, the prospect of bringing back the cheetah to its native habitat emerged as a daunting task with a mosaic of challenges—from the complexities of habitat restoration, navigating socio-political landscapes, meticulous planning and management strategies to the training of field personnel. There were also ethical considerations regarding the origin of cheetah populations for reintroduction and the potential impact on existing flora and fauna.

The government's plea to introduce the African cheetah in India on an experimental basis was finally approved by the Supreme Court after a long wait in January 2020. But,

The book reveals the unique convergence of expertise from different stakeholders in India's conservation narrative

the pandemic put a spanner in the works, and two years later, the Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India—an over 300-page exhaustive document reflecting the past 13 years of efforts to reintroduce the cheetah—was published in January 2022. The first eight cheetahs arrived in September 2022 from Namibia, followed by 12 from South Africa in February 2023. After one year, the Project showcased India's exemplary vision and implementation in the field of wildlife conservation. That the cheetahs quickly adapted to their new home in Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, exploring, hunting and giving birth to a new generation, are indicators of success. And, this is just the beginning of a long process of re-establishing an iconic species. The book brings to light the multifaceted dimensions of the Project that intertwines scientific inquiry, ecological restoration, socio-economic considerations and cultural sensitivities. It also reveals the unique convergence of expertise from wildlife biologists, conservationists, policymakers, local communities and various other stakeholders invested in the conservation narrative of India, while distilling all the past literature—technical, scientific and historicalin one place.

The Indian Express New Delhi, 12 May 2024 Suspected poacher killed in gunfight in Kaziranga

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE GUWAHATI, MAY 11

A SUSPECTED poacher was killed in a gunfight with forest guards early on Saturday in the Kaziranga National Park.

Kaziranga director Sonali Ghosh said there were some intelligence inputs on the likelihood of intruders attempting to enter the park, following which the authorities stepped up the regular surveillance and combing operations in the last few days along the riverside regions of the park.

According to a statement released by the state forest department, patrolling and surveillance teams had been stationed along the border areas of the park on May 10, along with forest frontline teams from Eastern Assam Wildlife and Biswanath Wildlife divisions. It stated that early on Saturday, a patrolling party stationed near an antipoaching camp under the Agoratoli range of the national park intercepted a group of people, who retaliated when challenged and the confrontation escalated into a gunbattle.

The next morning, an unidentified body was recovered from the site, along with a suspected modified 0.303 rifle and live ammunition.

"As the incident took place while it was dark, it was difficult to ascertain how many people were part of the group but from our past experiences (we can say), they usually move in groups of two to three with one weapon. The weapon has been recovered but the others are absconding," said Ghosh.





SAVING THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

The Great Indian Bustard critically endangered and integral to India's wildlife heritage, faces multifaceted threats including habitat loss, collisions with infrastructure, and poaching. As efforts to safeguard the species intensify, the imperative to reconcile competing interests between development and conservation grows more urgent



BKP SINHA



ARVIND K JHA

The WII had already identified ten potential locations for GIB breeding centres in 2017, setting the stage for proactive conservation measures. Drawing on expertise beyond borders, the International **Fund for Houbara** Conservation (IFHC) from Abu Dhabi was enlisted as a technical partner due to its successful track record in breeding other bustard species. The collective efforts resulted in the establishment of two breeding centres in Rajasthan, housing a total of 29 GIBs, **bolstering hopes** for the species' survival

MK Ranjitsinh and Ors vs. Union of India has constituted a seven-member committee and tasked it with addressing the delicate balance between conservation initiatives for the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) and the installation of renewable energy projects in its habitat. This decision follows the Court's acknowledgement of the challenges posed by its April 2021 directive mandating the burial of all power lines within the GIB habitat, a measure claimed to be expensive and impractical over extensive distances by Power companies and the Central Government. With the complex interplay between development and conservation at the forefront, the committee has to assess primarily the viability of reducing the area banned for overhead powerlines from 80,000 to 13,663 square kilometres. The GIB figures in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 in Appendix I of CITES and is classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. Included in the National Wildlife Action Plan, it has been earmarked for a recovery program under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India. During the Mughal and British periods, the GIB was one of the top game birds. Historical accounts suggest that tribal Bhils used to set fire to the bushes surrounding their nests to trap females. The species has been facing numerous threats to its survival including occasional poaching, collisions with high-tension electric wires, fast-moving vehicles, and free-ranging dogs in villages. Additionally, habitat loss and alteration due to the diversion of grasslands and scrublands, extensive agricultural expansion, mechanized farming practices, and infrastructural developments such as irrigation systems,

he Supreme Court of India in



roads, and windmills pose significant challenges. Weighing approximately 15 kilograms each, their bulk poses a challenge when navigating around electricity lines or windmills, often resulting in fatalities or injuries. The dry semi-desert regions where the bustard once thrived,

where the bustard once thrived, particularly in parts of Rajasthan, have also undergone significant transformation due to irrigation canals, converting the landscape into highly cultivated areas. Present-day threats include further expansion of linear infrastructure such as roads and electric power transmission lines leading to collision-related mortality. The proposed expansion of renewable energy infrastructure, including large-scale deployment of solar panels across desert and grassland areas, further jeopardizes the bird's habitat.

In its historical range, the great Indian bustard once existed across Western India, spanning 11 states, including parts of Pakistan, with strongholds in the Thar desert and the Deccan plateau. Known for its preference for flat, open landscapes with minimal disturbance, it thrives in grasslands. Their numbers, however, have dwindled dramatically, with only around 150 individuals estimated to survive as of 2018, down from around 250 in 2011. Most of the population, estimated at around 120, is concentrated in the arid grasslands of Thar, Rajasthan, particularly in the Desert National Park and the Pokhran Field Firing Range, with smaller populations reportedly scattered elsewhere in the country. In Maharashtra, two individuals had been

reported in Nanaj, Solapur district, where the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is actively involved in conservation efforts. Concerningly, however, the absence of the great Indian bustard in Nanaj in Maharashtra as well as in the Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh for the past few years suggests a looming risk of local-level extinctions Known for their slow reproductive rate, GIBs lay only a few eggs and invest nearly a year in caring for their chicks. Establishing a founder population requires a minimum of 20 breeding females and 5 to 10 breeding males. In the relatively better populated Thar region, specifically focused upon in the

Supreme Court case, the looming risks of the maze of infrastructural development, food insecurity, conflicts, and climate change-induced impacts exacerbate the challenges faced by them. As regards actions taken to safeguard the dwindling population of the GIB, the MoEFCC, Rajasthan Forest Department, and Wildlife Institute of India (WII), came together in 2018 to initiate conservation breeding programs and conduct scientific research for GIB's conservation.

Notably, the WII had already identified ten potential locations for GIB breeding centres in 2017, setting the stage for proactive conservation measures. Drawing on expertise beyond borders, the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC) from Abu Dhabi was enlisted as a technical partner due to its successful track record in breeding other bustard species. The collective efforts resulted in the establishment of two breeding centres in Rajasthan, housing a total of 29 GIBs, bolstering hopes for the species' survival. Further support poured in from WWF-India, which helped in crafting guidelines for a comprehensive State Action Plan for Resident Bustard Recovery Programme and backed future expansion plans in Gujarat. In Karnataka's Siruguppa taluka, the Ballari Forest division proposed a Detailed Project Report with an

investment of INR 24 crores for a research centre dedicated to the GIB cause. In Maharashtra, with GIB sighted in recent years neither in Nanaj of Solapur nor in Warora of Vidarbha region, a proposed collaboration with Rajasthan aims to exchange tigers for GIBs, with plans to establish a breeding centre in Nanaj.

Assessment of the overall strength, budgetary outlay, and position of the MoEFCC and forest departments in decision-making in the Government reflects that the effectiveness of efforts to secure the future of the GIB is just inadequate. The weakening of statutory instruments and establishments related to forest and wildlife conservation in the recent past is quite revealing in this regard. In the case of GIB also, on an uneven field, stakeholders grapple with the urgent need to balance developmental agendas with conservation imperatives, claiming to be providing a sustainable coexistence for this emblematic avian

species. However, amidst endeavours by some professional foresters, a pressing challenge looms large today. About 66,337 sq. km of land for overhead transmission lines are considered despite WII's recommendation that mitigation of powerline-linked mortality required a ban on high tension wires, undergrounding of <66 kv wires, and retrofitting of existing wires with bird diverters. WII's findings also underscored the perilous predicament, with an estimated 16 GIB fatalities annually due to collisions with hightension lines in the Thar region alone. Such alarming mortality rates, validated by tagging efforts by WII, are in sharp contrast to the indication of the number of recorded mortality cases as insignificant before the highest court. Using a lower number of collision deaths as a basis for allowing a network of overhead powerlines in GIB habitats will be akin to advocating the discontinuance of medicines in a pandemic situation where due to a reduced number of survivors, deaths per day may be lowered.

An approach of balancing conservation and development by permitting power projects, in a critically endangered species' habitat with just about 140 survivors, currently less polluting than non-renewable resources deserves perhaps a second look. The idea of development and its impact created and sold by the most selfish species on earth pitted against the right to life of a species at the brink of extinction needs to adopt a much wider and multi-sectoral perspective.

Îndia's insolation data in many areas, not natural habitats of GIB, presents similar ranges as in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The Annual Mean Daily Global Solar Radiation (AMDGSR) map indicates 6.8 to 5.6 kWh/ m2/ day in different parts of Rajasthan and Gujrat; 6.0 to 5.8 in Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Ladakh; and 5.8 to 5.6 in states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu.

India's solar power generation capacity having reached about 76 GW in FY24, is concentrated in Rajasthan and Gujarat with 17.8 GW and 10.1 GW. Large states like MP and UR are major disappointments. Authorities should consider the country-wide spread and benefits, site-specific costs on infrastructure, and the capacity utilization factor (CUF) figures reported to be 20 for Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh; 19 for Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Madhya Pradesh; and 18 for Gujarat. Considering this scenario, any honest concern for balancing conservation and development must, instead of compromising GIB's future, explore and exploit the potential spread out in the country for solar projects. That would be true climate justice! (The writers are Former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, UP and Maharashtra; views are personal)