

2 in net for selling protected parrots

Indu Bhagat

PUNE

The Pune Forest Department, in coordination with the Customs Department, has taken strict action against the illegal sale of Alexandrine Parakeets, a protected species, leading to the arrest of two individuals involved in wildlife trafficking.

Acting on a tip-off, officials conducted an operation near Pune Railway Station on Feb 5 and nabbed an accused, identified as Sheikh Sarfaraz Sheikh Khadir. Further investigations led to the identification of another suspect, Sachin Sujit Rozoria, who was apprehended at Sangvi Phata on Feb 9. Upon confirmation of his involvement, he was arrested and presented before the Special Court in Shivajinagar, which granted a one-day remand.

On Monday, the Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) Court in Pune remanded the accused to judicial custody until Feb 21. Following the court order, both individuals were transferred to Yerawada Central Prison.

The operation was conducted under the guidance of Assistant Conservator of



Forests Mangesh Tate and led by Forest Range Officer Suresh Barak. Several officials, including Wildlife Officer Vaibhav Babar, Pramod Raskar, and Forest Guards Kaluram Kad, Anil Rathod, Madhukar Godge, Okar Gund, Vinayak Tathe and Ramesh Shinde, played crucial roles in the crack-down.

A police official stated, "Following an investigation, the accused were found guilty under Sections 2, 39, 48(a), 49, 50, and 51 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. A case was registered against them, and they were arrested."

The Pune Forest Department has urged the public to report any illegal wildlife trade or suspicious activities to help combat trafficking.

VADODARA

27 turtles seized from a bungalow

The Forest Department, along with the Animal Cruelty Prevention Board, rescued 27 turtles from a house in Vaibhavi Bungalows in the Alkapuri area of the city last week. The operation was conducted based on specific information received by Rameshbhai of the Gujarat State Animal Welfare Board. Rameshbhai told the media that the house owner was initially evasive in her responses, but when informed that keeping wild animals is a criminal offence, she eventually revealed 27 turtles. In addition to those seized, three more turtles were confiscated on Saturday. The landlord failed to provide a satisfactory explanation regarding the origin of the turtles.



PEAS IN A PODCAST

A Walk On The Wild Side

'We listened to the warning. An angry hippo is 4 tons of bad attitude. And that's just the start of Kenya's wild side.' In the episode, **Kenya's Wildlife Warriors**, of the



podcast 'Overheard At National Geographic', you're taken deep into the heart of the country's

wildlife. This compelling episode is on conservationist Paula Kahumbu's mission to reconnect Kenyans with their own natural heritage.

With host Peter Gwin's engaging narration, it's a must-listen for anyone interested in wildlife, environmental justice — and, simply, in a gripping story told well.

The episode flips the traditional tourism narrative — wildlife isn't just for foreign visitors snapping safari photos, it belongs to locals too. Kahumbu's passion shines through as she works to bring the wonders of the Serengeti into local living rooms.

The storytelling is immersive, packed with rich soundscapes — chattering colobus monkeys, eerie laughter of hyenas — and fascinating wildlife facts. From the thundering wildebeest migration to the elusive African wild dog, this podcast paints a vivid picture of the intricate ecosystem that needs protecting.

Addressing the growing threat of forest fires

As wildfires swept throughout Los Angeles last month, destroying homes and causing casualties and displacements, the urgency of addressing and preventing forest fires took centre stage once again. Unfortunately, forest fires become a point of conversation only when some major incident causes irrevocable damage and captures media and public attention. The fires are a stark reminder that no place is immune from their impacts and that we need a clear pathway to prevent and manage them as their frequency increases.

In India, the situation is equally alarming. According to the Forest Survey of India, more than 36% of the country's forest cover is prone to fire. An analysis by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water states that there has been a 10-fold increase in forest fire incidences in the last two decades, whereas the total forest cover has increased by merely 1.12%.

Living on the fringes of the Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand, I see the immense value of India's forests, not just as critical enablers of wildlife conservation and sources of biodiversity, but as lifelines for local communities that live around them. While Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh often capture headlines for forest fires, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Karnataka, among others, are also grappling with the frequency and intensity of forest fires.

Devastating consequences

According to various reports, nearly 90% of these fires are caused by human activities such as deliberate land clearing, slash-and-burn agriculture, and unattended campfires. These factors, coupled with climate change-driven factors such as rising temperatures and extended dry spells, intensify the risk of forest fires.

Forest fires have widespread consequences – natural, social, and economic – that are all



**Suryaprabha
Sadasivan**

Senior Vice President,
Chase India

India has put in place several policies and schemes to address forest fire management, but needs to do much more

interconnected. Besides the direct loss of trees, wildlife, and biodiversity, they contribute significantly to carbon emissions. A report by the World Resources Institute estimates that Indian forest fires emit approximately 69 million tonnes of CO₂ annually. Forest fires result in the loss of timber and non-timber forest products, essential for forest-dependent communities, contributing to direct economic losses. A 2018 report by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change estimated that forest degradation (including forest fires) results in an annual economic loss of approximately ₹1.74 lakh crore. Forest fires also disrupt the water cycle, cause soil fertility degradation, and worsen human-wildlife conflict as animals seek refuge in human settlements.

India has put in place several policies and schemes to address forest fire management, such as the National Action Plan on Forest Fires and the Forest Fire Prevention and Management Scheme (FFPMS). The centrally sponsored FFPMS assists State governments in strengthening their forest fire prevention and management capabilities.

A more robust response

However, given the growing intensity of forest fires in India, much more remains to be done. First, Budget constraints have proven to be an obstacle. For example, the FFPMS's funding allotment has fluctuated over time. In 2019-2020, it received ₹46.40 crore, followed by ₹32.47 crore in 2020-2021, ₹34.26 crore in 2021-2022, and ₹28.25 crore in 2022-2023. The budget projection for 2023-2024 was ₹51 crore, which was revised to ₹40 crore. The planned allocation for 2024-2025 is ₹50 crore. This shows the need for more steady support.

On the technology front, the existing Forest Fire Alert System cannot distinguish between forest fires and other types of fires, delaying ground-level validation and response. India could use

advanced predictive modelling to help identify high-risk areas based on climatic and geographic data. This must be supplemented by using drones equipped with thermal imaging cameras to monitor fire-prone areas, assess damage, and guide firefighting efforts. States such as Tamil Nadu and Odisha have already piloted such initiatives, which could be scaled nationally. In addition, there is merit in also exploring how relevant and existing data from the Forest Survey of India, the India Meteorological Department, and the Indian Space Research Organisation can be integrated and analysed for better forest fire management.

Equipping more and more local communities to collect and share real-time data to report fires as soon as they are sighted through mobile applications, toll-free helplines, and SMS-based systems can strengthen early warning systems and ensure rapid, localised response. In Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, self-help groups, primarily women, collect pine needles to blunt future fires. India can also draw from Nepal's Community Forest User Groups and Indonesia's Fire-Free Village Program to strengthen community forest fire management.

Empowering communities with awareness, training, and resources and engaging youth as 'forest fire scouts' can foster stewardship, combining local knowledge with modern tools like fire risk mapping and controlled burns.

Forest fires are not just an environmental issue – they are societal and economic, affecting livelihoods, health, and the foundation of our ecosystems. Addressing this challenge requires the collaboration of policymakers, scientists, civil society groups, and communities. From creating supporting infrastructure through policy intervention, improved budgeting, technology adoption, and building a cadre of trained personnel to empowering communities – all measures must go hand-in-hand to turn the tide.

Balancing conservation and livelihoods in HP's forests



PRAKASH BHANDARI
CO-FOUNDER, HIMDHARA,
PALAMPUR, HP

THE longstanding issue of forest land occupation for agriculture and habitation in Himachal Pradesh remains unresolved. In its order on July 17, 2024, the Shimla High Court stated that encroachments on forest land cannot be regularised by the state government without approval from the Central government under the Forest Conservation Act, 1980. Following this, a series of eviction orders were issued.

In Himachal Pradesh, where two-thirds of the geographical area is classified as forest land and 90 per cent of the population resides in rural areas surrounded by forests, the dependence of communities on forest resources for survival and livelihoods is undeniable.

With agricultural land comprising only about 10 per cent of the total area and the average landholding size being less than one hectare, access to land

remains a critical issue.

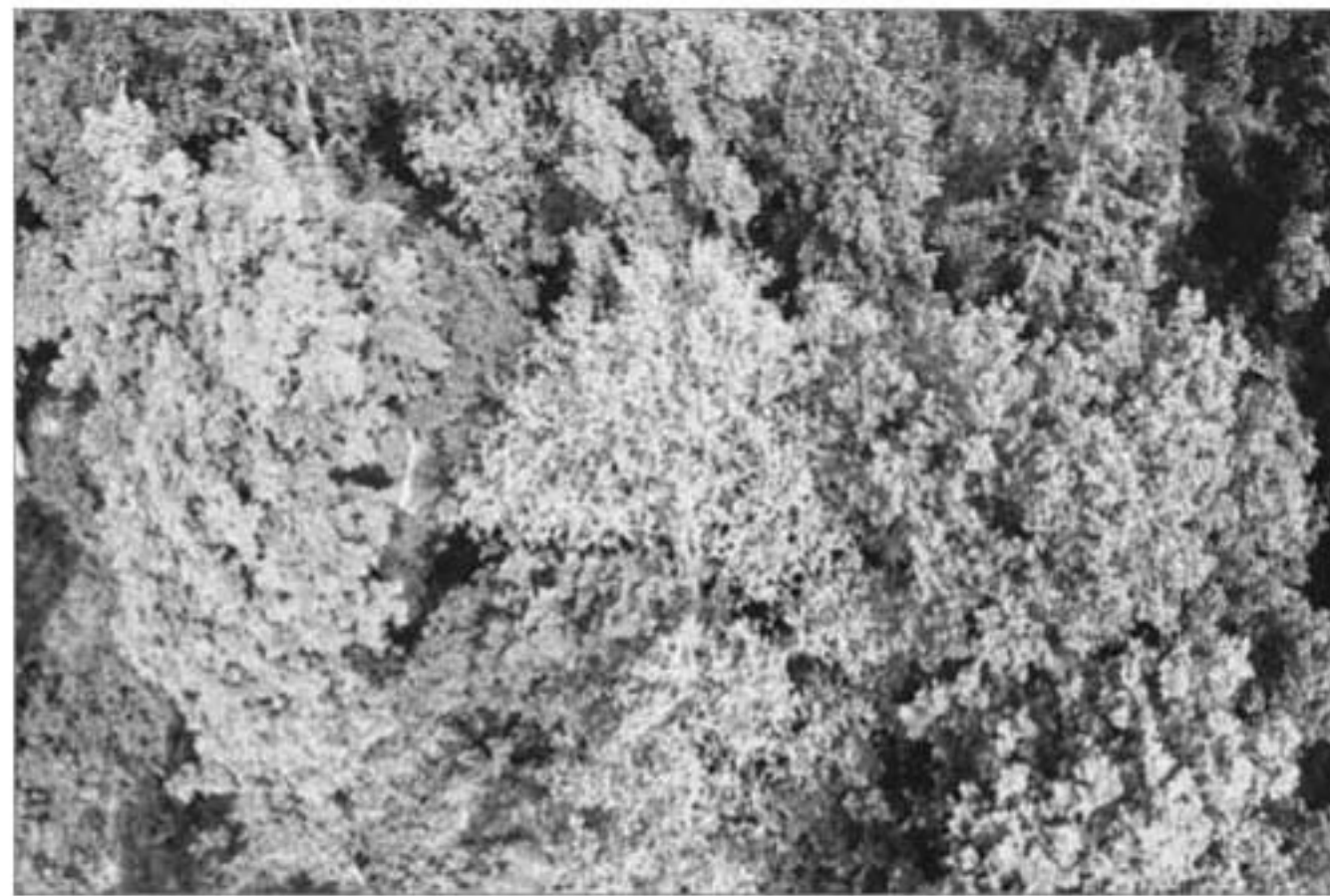
Under the Land Regularisation Policy of 2002, approximately 1.67 lakh families applied to legalise their occupation of forest land.

Additionally, land settlement records indicate a significant number of unauthorised occupations. For example, during the 1989 land settlement in Spiti, over 1,200 cases of *najayaz kabza* (unauthorised occupation) were recorded, representing nearly 50 per cent of the total households.

To address the situation, the state government decided to intervene in the *Godavaraman* case pending before the Supreme Court of India — a move that is only partially welcome.

While some aspects of this intervention align with the interests of the affected communities, concerns remain regarding the true intent and effectiveness of the government's approach in protecting the people who are facing eviction.

The government's decision to approach the Supreme Court to exclude the allotable pool and certain other land categories from the definition of forests is a crucial step. If the state secures relief, it could facilitate the allocation of land to landless families and those displaced by natural disasters.



SURVIVAL ISSUE: In HP, two-thirds of the area is forest land and 90% of the people live in rural areas surrounded by forests. Their dependence on forests for livelihoods is undeniable. TRIBUNE PHOTO

When implemented effectively, this move could help address land scarcity and support the vulnerable communities in need of rehabilitation.

However, the proposal to de-reserve certain land categories should not rely solely on revenue records. It must also include an assessment of the actual physical and ecological status of the land.

It will be necessary to present a well-founded argument, demonstrating that this will not cause any harm to the existing forest areas and that it will prevent new conflicts and eco-

logical impacts.

This requires a cautious approach as the Supreme Court, in its order from February last year, ruled that the definition of "forest" would continue to have a broad and all-encompassing meaning, including 1.97 lakh square km of undeclared forest land.

The government's other decision to get the permission of the Supreme Court to conduct a forest settlement under the Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA), appears unnecessary. The Central government has already enacted the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, the very

purpose of which was to address the anomalies of the settlement processes under the IFA. It explicitly acknowledges the failure, terming it as a "historical injustice" to forest-dependent communities.

We don't need to reinvent the wheel to settle the rights under the IFA. Instead of seeking the suspension of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, to conduct the forest settlement process under the IFA, 1927, the focus should be on the proper implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, which was specifically designed to recognise and safeguard the rights of forest dwellers.

Forests in India are governed by the Indian Forest Act and the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA). Seeking forest settlement solely under the IFA will not fully serve the purpose.

In Himachal Pradesh, many national parks and wildlife sanctuaries were declared without properly settling the rights of the forest-dependent communities. The case of settling 53 habitation rights in the Kalatop Wildlife Sanctuary, Dalhousie (Chamba), under the FRA highlights this issue.

To address such historical oversight, the state government must advocate for the recognition of the rights provided under the Forest

Rights Act, which applies to all types of forest land.

The government must demonstrate the political will to implement the FRA effectively to safeguard livelihoods and justice for those facing eviction.

It should first intervene in the high court, where it is already a party, and request time for the FRA implementation to protect the eligible right-holders from eviction.

Delaying action under the pretext of the Supreme Court intervention, while neglecting the available legal recourse, merely shifts responsibility and leaves the vulnerable communities without protection or justice.

The rights of people and forest conservation must go hand in hand. A well-balanced approach — one that safeguards livelihoods while ensuring communities take responsibility for conserving the natural resources they depend on — can be achieved through the legal framework provided by the Forest Rights Act.

This will help uphold both the rights of the forest dwellers and the integrity of the forests.

The government must act now to not only protect the rights of those who rely on forests for their survival but also uphold justice and sustainability in forest governance.

The HP govt must demonstrate the political will to implement the Forest Rights Act effectively to safeguard livelihoods and justice for those facing eviction.

Canconkars oppose highway widening, demand tunnel at Karmal Ghat

Feasibility study backs residents' concerns about ecological damage and fragile terrain prone to landslides, recommends tunnel construction for NH-66 project through Western Ghats section

Team Herald

MARGAO: Residents of Canacona have strongly opposed the proposed widening of NH-66 (formerly NH-17) along the existing alignment at Karmal Ghats, urging authorities to opt for a tunnel alternative instead. Their concerns have been supported by South Goa MP Captain Viriato Fernandes, who has written to Union Highway Minister Nitin Gadkari, requesting a reconsideration of the project.

Backing their argument is a feasibility study conducted by Aarvee Associates Architects Engineers & Consultants Pvt Ltd., which was commissioned by the Goa PWD. The study examined the stretch of NH-66 from Patradevi to Pollem, with particular focus on the Karmal Ghat section between Km 570 and Km 582. According to the findings, the terrain is fragile and prone to landslides, making a tunnel the safer and more sustainable alternative.

Environmental concerns form a major part of the

ARTI DAS



opposition. Karmal Ghat is an integral part of the Western Ghats, a globally recognized biodiversity hotspot, home to protected wildlife such as tigers, bison, pangolins, and various species of deer. Many of these animals are covered under Schedule-I and Schedule-II of the Wildlife Protection Act. Residents fear that expanding the road would fragment habitats, increase human-wildlife conflict, and cause irreparable damage to the fragile ecosystem.

Several residents recall

that just four decades ago, Karmal Ghat was an ever-green forest where travelers needed sweaters even during summer months due to its cool climate. Over the years, parts of the landscape have changed due to monoculture teak plantations, but much of the natural forest is slowly regenerating, making its preservation all the more important.

In his letter to Gadkari, Captain Fernandes highlighted recent disasters in Kerala and Karnataka, citing the Wayanad land-

slides and road collapses along the Ankola highway as warnings of what could happen if infrastructure projects in the Western Ghats do not account for the region's ecological sensitivity. He also raised concerns about the impact on tribal communities who depend on the forests for their livelihoods, arguing that the project violates the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, as proper consultation and consent procedures have

TUNNEL OVER ROAD EXPANSION

- The report highlights that the existing road has substandard horizontal and vertical curves, especially between Km 579 and Km 582, making it hazardous for vehicles
- It proposes a 1.45 km twin tunnel as a superior solution, which would improve road geometry and safety
- Vehicles using the tunnel could maintain speeds of up to 100 kmph, compared to the current 30-40 kmph limit on the winding ghat road.
- The tunnel option would prevent large-scale deforestation. While road widening would require clearing 11.7 hectares of forest land, a tunnel would allow for natural revegetation post-construction.
- With an estimated 22,000 vehicles using the highway daily, the tunnel's shorter and flatter route would cut fuel consumption and save approximately Rs 8 crore annually in fuel costs, and reduce carbon emissions as well

not been followed.

The viability of tunnel construction has already been demonstrated in the region. The Konkan Railway successfully operates a tunnel through the same ghat section, and railway officials have confirmed that the required technology and expertise for such construction are available. The estimated cost of tunnel construction ranges from Rs 50-100 crore per kilometre per track, which resi-

dents argue is a worthwhile investment considering the long-term benefits in terms of safety, efficiency, and environmental preservation.

While residents acknowledge the need for improved road infrastructure, they insist that development should not come at the cost of ecological destruction and safety risks. They stress that in the 21st century, infrastructure planning must balance progress with environmental responsibility.

'Doing everything to check elephant attacks'

After two more fatal wild elephant attacks in State, Kerala Forest Minister apprises Assembly of steps taken to check intrusion of wildlife into human habitats; measures include controlled burning of forests to restore grasslands, filling gaps in solar fencing, and excavating elephant-proof trenches

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Two back-to-back fatal wild elephant attacks in Idukki and Wayanad districts of Kerala have reignited public concerns about the effectiveness of the Forest department's measures to address the increasing occurrences of human-wildlife conflict in rural localities with large settler-farmer and plantation worker populations.

A wild elephant fatally trampled Kappad Unnathil Manu, a farmer, in Wayanad on Monday. His body was found on Tuesday morning. Another rampaging wild elephant gored Sofia Ismail, a plantation worker, to death in Idukki

on Monday.

Forest Minister A.K. Saseendran on Monday apprised the State Assembly of measures adopted by the government to check the intrusion of wildlife into human habitations for water and forage which often peaked during summer.

On February 1, the government initiated a campaign to supply food, fodder, and water for wild animals in their natural habitat, aiming to reduce the frequency of incursions into populated areas and farmland, he said.

The measures involve excavating some 1,434 artificial ponds, establishing waterholes, maintaining 574 wetlands, and constructing check-dams.



Reaching out: The government has initiated a campaign to supply food and water to wild animals in their natural habitats. FILE PHOTO

Additionally, the Forest department has commenced planting fruit trees within forests. It has restored 1,583.85 hectares of acacia, Manchiyam, teak, and eucalyptus plantations to natural forests.

The government has begun controlled burning of

forests to restore grasslands. It has also filled gaps in the solar fencing, excavated additional elephant-proof trenches, and erected walls and traditional fences. Furthermore, the government is installing digital fences and light and sound systems linked to

animal intrusion alert systems to deter marauding elephants. It has also cleared trees and undergrowth along elephant paths to prevent the wildlife from detouring into residential localities, said the Minister.

Mr. Saseendran said the department had increased patrols in human-wildlife conflict (HWC) hotspots and established inter-State committees to monitor wildlife movement in adjacent forests. At least 28 special teams have been deployed in HWC hotspots across the State to respond swiftly to wildlife threats. The government has equipped the rapid response teams (RRT) with the latest tools, including firearms, centralised control rooms, and

tranquilliser guns.

He stated that Kerala has notified the Centre to classify feral monkeys and wild boars as vermin to manage their burgeoning population. The Forest department has also put snake catchers, chiefly trained volunteers, in place to rescue venomous snakes from populated localities. The government has engaged licensed shooters and declared panchayat president, municipal and Corporation chairpersons as honorary wildlife wardens to shoot down wild boars that trespass on human habitations, he added.

Meanwhile, Leader of the Opposition V.D. Sathiesan blamed the government for the death of people in wildlife attacks.

Elephant tramples farmer to death

BAHRAICH, Feb 11: A 75-year-old farmer was trampled to death by an elephant in a village near the Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary here, officials said on Tuesday. The incident took place in Bardia village under Sujauli police station limits late on Monday night. The farmer, Brijlal, was sleeping on a 'machan' (resting place) on a tree to guard his crops in his field when an elephant came from a nearby forest and shook the tree, causing him to fall. The elephant then trampled him to death, villagers said. *(PTI)*

PROMOTING EMPATHY

Elle, the elephant: On a mission to make children kinder to animals

BENGALURU, DHNS

Asia's first empathy-building animatronic elephant, Elle, visited St Joseph's School in Bengaluru on Tuesday as part of a nationwide awareness tour by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India.

Elle, a life-like mechanical elephant, is designed to help children understand that animals experience emotions such as pain, fear, joy, and love, just like humans, and that they deserve to live in peace.

Since May 2023, Elle has reached over 1.65 lakh students across various schools in India.

Visit to B'luru schools

During her visit to Bengaluru, Elle will also stop at several schools, including National Public School (Indiranagar), One World



A student admires 'Elle' at a school in Bengaluru on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

International School (Whitefield), Ujjval World School, Presidency School (RT Nagar), Winmore

Academy (Whitefield and Jakkur), Samshidh International School (Horamavu), and Little Millennium.

Goa to ban use of farm land for commercial activities

Gerard de Souza

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PANAJI: Chief minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday unveiled the Goa Amritkal Agriculture Policy, which lays out a road map for the agriculture sector with an aim to “restore, revive and preserve” the state’s agricultural heritage.

Among the highlights of the policy is a ban on the conversion of agricultural land, especially paddy fields, for non-agricultural purposes including for residential or commercial construction — a move the chief minister said would “keep Goa green”.

“The focus of the policy will be to preserve Goa’s valuable agri-

cultural heritage. Goa’s fields need to be preserved... It is our responsibility to maintain green Goa. Even if the TCP (town and country planning) department converts paddy agricultural land, we have already passed a law that paddy agriculture land will not be converted — that will never be converted,” Sawant announced, while unveiling the policy.

The move comes at a time when Goa is witnessing a construction boom, fuelled in part by the demand for holiday homes and second homes.

In 2023, the Goa government passed a law banning the sale of agricultural land to non-agriculturists and for non-agriculture



Pramod Sawant

purposes in a bid to protect the state’s lush green paddy fields and thickly treed hillsides.

The Goa Amritkal Agriculture Policy, approved by the state cabinet late last week, defines rice lands as “morod”, “ker” and “khazans”, local terms for terraced, flat and reclaimed lands respec-

tively, used to plant rice. Land described as rice, morod, ker and khazans in the revenue department’s Form I & XIV will be prevented from being converted, Sawant said.

“The focus is on protecting Goa’s valuable agricultural heritage while combining it with modern farming techniques to boost productivity and sustainability,” the CM said.

Around 40% of Goa’s land is agricultural (including orchards) of which, around 22% is under annual crops such as rice and vegetables. Only 10% is available for construction while the rest is forest (protected/reserve/private) including national park and wild-

life sanctuaries amounting to 34.63% of land, coastal lands, which amounts 10.8%, water bodies including rivers, lakes which accounts for 5.32%.

“The policy is to give all possible help to the farmers. Goa will remain green and a majority of land in Goa will be saved from conversion,” state agriculture minister Ravi Naik said.

“The intent of the policy is good, but if it only remains on paper, we will be back to square one. The problems in Goa’s agriculture sector have been accumulating for years and cannot be solved overnight,” Elsa Fernandes, president of Khazan Society of Goa, said.

Haryana to build jungle safari in Gurugram

STAFF REPORTER ■

GURUGRAM

The Haryana Government is making all efforts to ensure that tourists get international-level facilities in the world's largest jungle safari proposed in Gurugram.

In continuation of this, Environment, Forest and Wildlife Minister Rao Narbir Singh is constantly visiting major wildlife rescue centers and jungle safaris in the country and abroad, taking stock of the measures taken to preserve wildlife there and the facilities being provided to visitors in the jungle safari.

The Environment Minister, along with departmental officials associated with the project, visited the Gorewada Wildlife Safari in Nagpur, Maharashtra and Vantara Wildlife Rescue Center in Jamnagar, Gujarat and directed the concerned officials to study the best services and facilities provided there. He said the jungle safari to be built in Gurugram will be the world's largest jungle safari, so his effort is to provide the best mix of all the best wildlife rescue centers and jungle safaris in the world here.

He said the start of this project in the Aravalli mountain range will increase the footfall of tourists, create employment opportunities locally and promote tourism.

Injured elephant to be treated again

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Thrissur: Forest department officials have decided to provide another round of treatment to the injured wild elephant which was spotted again in Athirappilly over the last couple of days.

According to Vazhachal DFO Lakshmi, the chief wildlife warden has approved the proposal. The elephant will be darted and taken to the elephant centre at Kodanad for treatment. The services of the Kumki elephants from Wayanad will also be used for this operation. Officials said that the treatment would take one or two more days as some time would be required to carry out the preparatory operations.

However, the forest officials said they are not sure of the success of the treatment considering the elephant's condition. The jumbo, which has suffered injuries on the forehead, was given the first round of the treatment toward the end of last month and was let off in deep forests. However, the elephant returned to Athirappilly and was spotted at a couple of points over the last few days.

Jairam calls for scrapping Aravalli Zoo Safari projects

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

CONGRESS leader Jairam Ramesh on Tuesday backed calls for scrapping the proposed Aravalli Zoo Safari project in south Haryana, saying the purpose of any intervention there should be conservation and restoration, not destruction or monetisation.

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Ramesh shares on X a letter written by a group of retired Indian Forest Services officers to PM Modi, urging him to put an end to the destructive project proposed in the Delhi-bordering state

Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to put an end to the “destructive” Aravalli Zoo Safari project proposed in the Delhi-bordering



state. “Thirty seven retired Indian Forest Services officers from across the country have written a letter to the Prime Minister

urging him to put an end to the destructive Aravalli Zoo Safari project proposed in south Haryana,” the former Union environment

minister said.

The Aravalli forests in Haryana are arguably the most degraded forests in the country and are particularly important for ecological balance in a state that has the lowest forest cover in India, the former environment minister said.

“In this context, the primary purpose of any intervention in this eco-sensitive area should be conservation and restoration, not destruction or monetisation,” Ramesh said. The letter read that

the Aravalli Mountain System is under highly stressed conditions due to anthropogenic activities and it needs PM Modi’s attention to save the ecological and geological heritage. “Recent scientific studies/researches have exposed the severe unrepairable environmental damages that have taken place due to ongoing land use changes in the Aravallis. The studies reveal that the continuous destruction of these fragile hill ecosystems

is causing significant irreversible biodiversity losses,” the letter said. The officers said the primary purpose of any intervention in an eco-sensitive area should be conservation and restoration and not destruction. “Around 2009, the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram declared a biodiversity park and partnered with civil society, corporates and residents to plant trees and restore the forest. Today, it has nearly 200 species of native plants, 183 species

of birds, numerous species of reptiles and insects,” it pointed out. Gurugram and Nuh Aravallis need rewilding of natural forests like this and not destructive zoo safari projects, the letter dated February 6 said.

“Therefore, Forests are essential lungs for breathing and sustenance of humans. Let us conserve and protect the millions of year-old Aravalli range to save our civilisation,” it said, urging the government to scrap the project.

Jairam Ramesh opposes Aravalli safari project, citing ecological concerns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Tuesday backed calls for scrapping the proposed Aravalli Zoo Safari project in south Haryana, saying the purpose of any intervention there should be conservation and restoration, not destruction or monetisation. Ramesh shared on social media a letter written by a group of retired Indian Forest Services officers to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, urging him to put an end to the "destructive" Aravalli Zoo Safari project proposed in the Delhi-bordering state.

"Thirty seven retired Indian Forest Services officers from across the country have written a letter to the Prime Minister urging him to put an end to the destructive Aravalli Zoo Safari project proposed in south Haryana," the former Union environment minister said. The Aravalli forests in Haryana are arguably the most degraded forests in the country and are particularly important for ecological balance in a state that has the lowest forest cover in India, the former environment minister said. "In this context, the primary purpose of any intervention in this eco-sensitive area should be conservation and restoration, not destruction or monetisation,"

Ramesh said. The letter read that the Aravalli Mountain System is under highly stressed conditions due to anthropogenic activities and it needs Prime Minister Modi's attention to save the ecological and geological heritage. "Recent scientific studies/researches have exposed the severe unrepairable environmental damages that have taken place due to ongoing land use changes in the Aravallis. The studies reveal that the continuous destruction of these fragile hill ecosystems is causing significant irreversible biodiversity losses," the letter said. The officers said the primary purpose of any intervention in an

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Jumbo falls to death in Manombolly forest, dies

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Coimbatore

A seven-year-old female elephant died after falling from a slope at Dhonimudi estate in Manombolly forest range of Anamalai Tiger Reserve (ATR). Forest department sources said the elephant may have died two or three days ago and field-level staff spotted the carcass on Monday evening.

Postmortem examination was conducted on Tuesday by Coimbatore forest veterinary officer A Sukumar and E Vijayaragavan, forest veterinary assistant surgeon of ATR.

“We suspect the elephant fell down from a slope in the Shoal forest. The animal had a pri-

mary illness of acute nephritis, and there were marks that the animal was dragged 15m in the slope into sternal recumbency, resulting in pulmonary-cardiac failure and death,” an officer said.

“The incident may have occurred two days ago. Scratch injuries and mild lacerated wounds were noticed on the left lateral abdominal regions, knee joints, and hind limbs,” he added.

Samples of the internal organ were sent for the histopathological examination to find out the cause of illness. The carcass was left in the open for scavenger animals to feed upon.

Kerala govt. faces flak after back-to-back elephant attacks

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Two back-to-back fatal wild elephant attacks in Idukki and Wayanad districts of Kerala have reignited public concerns about the effectiveness of the Forest department's measures to address the increasing occurrences of human-wildlife conflict in rural localities with large settler-farmer and plantation worker populations.

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Forest Minister A.K. Sa-

seendran on Monday apprised the State Assembly of measures adopted by the government to check the intrusion of wildlife into human habitations for water and forage which often peaked during summer.

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The measures involve excavating some 1,434 artificial ponds, establishing waterholes, maintaining 574 wetlands, and constructing check-dams.

Additionally, the Forest department has commenced planting fruit trees



Jumbo issue: The government has initiated a campaign to supply food and water to wild animals in their natural habitats. FILE PHOTO

within forests. It has restored 1,583.85 hectares of acacia, Manchiyam, teak, and eucalyptus plantations to natural forests.

Controlled burning

The government has begun controlled burning of forests to restore grasslands. It has also filled gaps in the solar fencing, exca-

vated additional elephant-proof trenches, and erected walls and traditional fences. Furthermore, the government is installing digital fences and light and sound systems linked to animal intrusion alert systems to deter marauding elephants. It has also cleared trees and undergrowth along elephant

paths to prevent the wildlife from detouring into residential localities, said the Minister.

Mr. Saseendran said the department had increased patrols in human-wildlife conflict (HWC) hotspots and established inter-State committees to monitor wildlife movement in adjacent forests. At least 28 special teams have been deployed in HWC hotspots across the State to respond swiftly to wildlife threats. The government has equipped the rapid response teams (RRT) with the latest tools, including firearms, centralised control rooms, and tranquilliser guns.

He stated that Kerala has notified the Centre to classify feral monkeys and wild boars as vermin to manage their burgeoning popula-

tion. The Forest department has also put snake catchers, chiefly trained volunteers, in place to rescue venomous snakes from populated localities. The government has engaged licensed shooters and declared panchayat president, municipal and Corporation chairpersons as honorary wildlife wardens to shoot down wild boars that trespass on human habitations, he added.

Meanwhile, Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan blamed the government for the death of people in wildlife attacks.

Wildlife raids on farmlands have dealt a death blow to the State's rural agrarian economy and created an atmosphere of fear in agricultural communities, he said.

Kerala on its toes as wild elephants kill 3 in 24 hours

Urgent meeting convened to explore ways to curb rising human-wild animal conflict

MANOJ VISWANATHAN @ Kochi

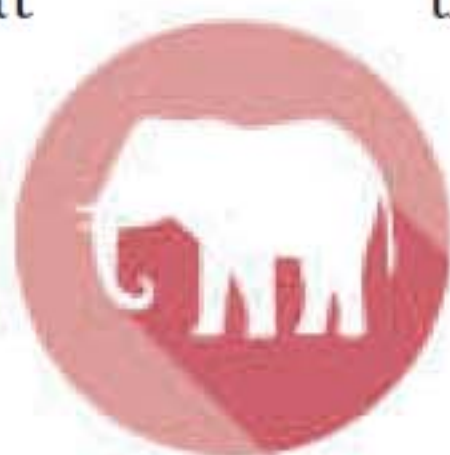
WITH protests raging in the high ranges following the death of three people in wild elephant attacks within a span of 24 hours, Forest Minister A K Saseendran has convened an urgent high-level meeting to explore ways to curb the rising human-wild animal conflict in the state.

Head of Forest Force Ganga Singh, Chief Wildlife Warden Pramod G Krishnan and other-principal chief conservators will deliberate over the prevailing situation at the meeting scheduled to be held at 2.30pm on Wednesday. Saseendran said the department will deploy the entire field staff, including social forestry officials, to strengthen patrolling in the conflict hotspots to avoid human casualty. This apart, primary response teams will be formed by recruiting local residents as volunteers to alert people about the presence of wild animals in their areas. On Tuesday, residents blockaded roads in Idukki and Wayanad districts, demanding protection from wild animals. As many as 11 people have died in wild jumbo attacks in Kerala between December 14, 2024, and February 11, 2025, indicating a rise in human-wildlife conflict. The body of Babu, 54, a

resident of Venkolla near Palode, Thiruvananthapuram, was found around 8 km inside the forest on Monday evening. Babu, who had gone to visit his relatives on the other side of the forest, was trampled by a wild elephant. He was missing for the past five days.

Manu, a 45-year-old tribal man, was killed by a wild elephant when he was returning after attending a temple festival at Kappad in Noolpuzha in Wayanad on Monday night. Both deaths occurred inside the forest. On Monday, Sofia Ismail of Peruvanthanam in Idukki was

trampled to death by a wild elephant when she went to take bath in a nearby stream. The same day, Prasad, a plantation worker, suffered rib fracture in a wild elephant attack at Ayyampuzha in Ernakulam district. Apart from elephants, there has been an increase in incidents of other wild animals, including tiger and leopards, straying into human habitations. On January 24, Radha, a tribal woman, was killed by a tiger at Pancharakolli in Wayanad. As shrinking water bodies and drying grasslands drive wild animals to human habitations, the forest department has launched Mission Food Fodder and Water (FFW) to ensure availability of food and water inside the forest.



Lion census 2025: CCTV cams to help traditional methods

Himanshu.Kaushik
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Ahmedabad: The five-yearly lion census in Gujarat scheduled to be held in May will for the first time incorporate CCTV footage alongside traditional methods of direct sighting, with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) likely to mark its debut as an observer.

While primary counting will rely on direct visual observation, CCTV recordings will provide supporting evidence for the 16th edition of the lion census.

The coming lion census is expected to take place on a "poornima" (full moon)—either in April or May. Forest department officers said WII has the expertise in conduct-

File Photo



EXPANDING KINGDOM: According to the 2020 census data, the population of Asiatic lions increased to 674, from 523 in 2015

ing leopard and tiger censuses across the country, in collaboration with the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Notably, in 2020, the forest department withdrew WII from the census process and even withdrew permissions

for their research projects on the Asiatic lion.

According to the 2020 census data, the population of Asiatic lions increased to 674, from 523 in 2015, marking a 28.87% increase—the highest growth rate since the forest department was set up.

Forest officers said the department has also decided to leverage its extensive network of CCTV cameras installed in the Gir sanctuary, villages in the census area, and the highways. The footage will be used as a corroborative tool in the final estimation.

"This technological integration aims to enhance the accuracy of population estimates while maintaining the traditional direct sighting approach," an officer said.

Manas Natl Park holds training prog

GUWAHATI, Feb 11: In order to strengthen wildlife protection measures, investigating officers of Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve in Assam were imparted advanced training on inquiry and examination of different cases, a senior official said on Tuesday. According to Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve Field Director C Ramesh, 27 investigating officers from six forest divisions of the park participated in an intensive five-day refresher training in Bansbari range recently. The training aimed to strengthen their expertise in investigation, evidence collection and framing wildlife offences by incorporating the latest amendments of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and recently amended criminal laws and procedures. *(PTI)*

State withdraws subsidy for 100 fishermen over death of olive ridleys

Oppili.P@timesofindia.com

Chennai: State fisheries department has withdrawn subsidies for 100 fishermen based in Chennai for violating the ban on fishing within five nautical miles of shoreline.

The decision comes in response to the death of more than 1,000 olive ridley turtles along the Chennai coastline during the last week of Jan.

The spike in turtle deaths coincided with the annual nesting season, resulting in wildlife authorities reporting a drastic decline in nesting activity. Officials were able to identify only 24 nests for the month, compared to significantly higher numbers in previous years. The subsidy withdrawal is seen as a measure to deter illegal fishing and protect the fragile marine ecosystem.

C V R Raghu Sekar, a traw-

The decision comes in response to the death of more than 1,000 olive ridley turtles along the Chennai coastline

ler owner from Kasimedu Fishing Harbour, however, criticized the department's decision, calling it hasty and unfair. He said that fishermen in Chennai respect sea turtles. "We worship them and would never harm them. If turtles get caught in our nets, the damage is to our equipment, which costs thousands of rupees to repair," he said.

Sekar also pointed to pollution as a possible cause for the turtle deaths, alleging that untreated wastewater from fish export units has severely impacted the marine ecosystem.

He accused the department of targeting trawler owners while failing to hold polluters accountable. Several fishermen were arrested under non-bailable charges, which Sekar condemned as unjust.

Another trawler owner defended the fishing community, stating that they were not using any new fishing gear that could endanger marine life. He emphasized that no proper necropsy was conducted to ascertain the cause of turtle deaths, leading to unfair blame on the fishermen.

Meanwhile, turtle conservationists reported that dead sea turtles continued to wash ashore along the Chennai coast. On average, they said, around half a dozen carcasses are spotted daily. The crisis has sparked debates over the impact of fishing practices and pollution on marine life.



Representational image

SUDDEN RISE IN TIGER SIGHTINGS IN SUNDARBANS

**GOUTAMI
SENGUPTA | DC**
HYDERABAD, FEB. 11

Recently, there has been a sudden increase in the number of tigers in the Sundarbans of West Bengal. India is attributing this rise to the current Bangladesh dispensation's indifference to providing food to the animals which is leading to the migrations.

A source in the forest department stated that 61 per cent of the Sundarbans falls in Bangladesh, while 39 per cent is in West Bengal.

The West Bengal government's forest department said tigers are being fed deer, pigs, and monkeys. This is done to maintain a steady food supply. The WB forest department alleges that the Bangladesh government stopped providing food after the Sheikh Hasina government fell last year.

The shortage of food has even led to stray incidents of tigers entering populated areas.

Forest officials in Bangladesh acknowledged the issue. "With the current situation in Bangladesh, it is difficult for the government to prioritise the food supply for tigers in the Sundarbans," a Bangladeshi official said.

Sundarbans tiger lands in trap cage after 24-hour op, set free in wild

Krishnendu Mukherjee &
Monotosh Chakraborty | TNN

Kolkata: The tiger, an adult male aged around 10 years, that had attacked and injured a forest worker at Nagenabad village under Moipith panchayat in Sundarbans' South 24 Parganas division was finally captured, after an effort of over 24 hours, in the wee hours of Tuesday in one of the trap cages placed in a field where it was hiding.

Divisional forest officer Nisha Goswami said it was caged around 3.30 am. "It was released back in the tiger reserve area later in the afternoon after being checked by vets. It was in good health and there were no injuries," she added. The release spot is around 50 km from Moipith.

The big cat had entered Nagenabad village on Sunday evening and attacked forest worker Ganesh Shyamal (30) on Monday morning when a team was installing nylon



The big cat, aged around 10, was released in the tiger reserve area

nets to isolate the village from the adjacent forest where the big cat was hiding.

SSKM trauma care unit head and critical care specialist Rajat Choudhury said: "His injuries on right eyelid are severe. Eye surgeons have repaired them but further reconstruction is needed and hence, a team of plastic surgeons has been roped in. Fractures were also found in his facial bones, which will also be repaired. Injuries on his left fo-

rearm and lower limbs were minor and they have been dressed up and sutured."

While foresters indicated surge in tiger numbers is presumably compelling sub-adults and aged big cats to venture into human settlements, experts suggest the nylon net fencing along 80 km stretch in this zone might require maintenance-replacement in some areas.

While the all-India tiger estimation report 2022 had

pegged the tiger number in the Indian Sundarbans at 101, including 20 in the South 24 Parganas forest division, sources indicated that the number in divisional forest may have risen to 25+, based on data from Dec 2023 to Feb 2024. The total figure, too, may have crossed 104. "However, a consolidated data will only be released by the Centre during the next cycle of their exercise in 2026," said an official.

Ex-chief wildlife warden Pradeep Vyas said immediate verification is needed to find out if replacement of nylon nets is required anywhere. According to him, replacement of the nets, lasting three-four years, costs approximately Rs 3 lakh per kilometre. "We have a renewal policy for the nets in every two and a half years. This work is in the pipeline," said Sundarbans Biosphere Reserve director Nilanjan Mullick.

(Inputs from
Sumati Yengkhom)



The tiger runs towards the forest after being released on Tuesday. Picture courtesy: South 24-Parganas Forest Division

Tiger trapped, released back into wild

DEBRAJ MITRA

Calcutta: The Sunderbans tiger that had strayed into a village and attacked forest personnel was captured in a trap cage early on Tuesday, forest officials said.

The tiger, an adult male, was released back into the wild on Tuesday afternoon.

The tiger had been hiding in agricultural land near Nagenabad village in the Kultali block of South 24-Parganas. It is suspected to have sneaked out of the Ajmalmari 11 forest compartment on Sunday night.

On Monday morning, the tiger attacked a member of a quick response team who was trying to rescue a villager who had climbed a tree to escape the claws.

Ganesh Shyamal, 36, a member of the team, comprising villagers trained by the forest department to drive away tigers from localities, is undergoing treatment at SSKM Hospital for serious injuries that he suffered trying to stave off the tiger.

"His condition is improving," a forest official said on Tuesday.

The tiger returned to hiding in the field and eluded a team of foresters for hours. The field was fenced with nylon nets on all four sides and two trap cages with live baits were set up inside. Eventually, around 3.30am, the tiger was captured in one of the cages, said a forest official.

The tiger was taken to a beat office, where vets examined it.

"The canines, eyes and other physical features were examined in detail. It is a full-grown male. The vets certified that the tiger was healthy," said Nisha Goswami, the divisional forest officer of the South

24-Parganas forest division.

Hours later, the tiger was released into a compartment of the Sundarban Tiger Reserve.

"It is quite far from the Ajmalmari forest. The tiger was released at a different location to minimise the possibility of its return to the human habitat," a forest official said.

A mechanised trawler carried the big cat to the edge of a creek during low tide.

As the cage door was lifted, the tiger leapt off the boat into the shallow waters. It took rapid strides and disappeared into the forest.

Nagenabad village is part of the Maipith area, which has seen several tiger-straying incidents this winter. But this is the first time a tiger attacked a human.

Maipith is separated from the forest compartments of Ajmalmari 1, 11 and Herobhanga 9 — all tiger habitats — by the Makri river. Though called a river in local parlance, it is actually a creek.

At several places, the waterbody is reasonably narrow and during low tide, the shallow water is hardly a barrier for animals and humans to cross over, said foresters.

A patch of mangroves on the village side of the riverbank provides an ideal cover for straying tigers. In this case, the tiger ventured out of the mangrove cover and came too close to the village. The field where it was caught is around 700m from the riverbank, said a forest official.

"We have set up around 30 trap cameras in strategic areas near the forests. Some areas are being illuminated. The lights are supposed to act as a deterrent to animals. Patrolling will be scaled up," said DFO Goswami.

Tigress from CG found dead in MP on return trek home

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bhopal: A three-year-old tigress, originally from Chhattisgarh and radio-collared in Madhya Pradesh, was found dead under mysterious circumstances in Singrauli district. Officials suspect it was trying to return to Chhattisgarh but died along the way.

The tigress had walked over 100km from Sanjay Tiger Reserve to Singrauli and was discovered dead on Monday night in Raudi village, located in Mada forest area, around 700km from Bhopal and close to the Chhattisgarh border.

According to forest officials, no movement was recorded from its radio collar for three days before its carcass was found.

Officials of Sanjay Gandhi Tiger Reserve said that the tigress came over from Chhattisgarh and was spotted in the forests of Amar-kantak. It was rescued and released in Sanjay Tiger Reserve in Sidhi on Jan 7. It was on the move since then and was located in Mada region on Feb 5.

The forest department tracked it 24x7 and warned villagers not to enter the forest until the tigress moves out. Officers grew alarmed when its location remained fixed in Raudi village.

"A preliminary examination revealed no external injuries. Cause of death will be determined after a post-mortem" APPCF (wildlife) L Krishnamurtey told TOI. The carcass will be cremated after autopsy.

Trance fest nightmare at Dream Beach turtle site

Equipment has arrived and tickets selling for Rs 8k online, but authorities claim no permission given

AUGUSTO RODRIGUES

VAGATOR, GOA: Dream Beach in Vagator, a known nesting site for the endangered Olive Ridley turtles, is in the eye of a storm with a six-day trance music festival titled Karacus Marakus ready to be held on its sands from February 14 to 19.

Curiously, while equipment for the festival has already arrived, all authorities – the police, the forest department, and tourism department officials – claimed no permission had been given for Karacus Marakus. This, even as the event's poster does the rounds on social media tickets sell for Rs 3,500-8,000 online.

Suraj Gawas, Police Inspector at Anjuna Police Station.

confirmed that no permission has been granted for the event. "We have received no request for permission for such an event, and there is no question of granting approval for it at a turtle nesting site," Gawas stated.

The controversy has sparked outrage, with critics pointing to the event's potential environmental impact. "This is not just noise pollution – it's a direct threat to the habitat of the Olive Ridley turtles, which are a protected species under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. The audacity of



the organiser to choose this location highlights the precarious law-and-order situation," said Desmond D'Souza, an activist against noise pollution.

Foreign tourists visiting the area expressed their dismay, with one saying, "It's painful to see that heavy equipment has been brought onto the beach and a massive stage built in an area that is marked as a turtle nesting site. The noise and the vehicles will surely prevent the turtles from coming ashore to lay their eggs."

Five Olive Ridleys laid eggs here in February, while 10 others returned without nesting, according to reports.

Cont on Pg 11 >>

“ This is not just noise pollution – it's a direct threat to the habitat of the Olive Ridley turtles, a protected species under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. The audacity of the organiser to choose this location highlights the precarious law-and-order situation

– Desmond D'Souza, noise pollution activist

“ We have received no request for permission for such an event, and there is no question of granting approval for it at a turtle nesting site

– Suraj Gawas, Anjuna PI

“ No requests for any festivals or parties have been submitted to us

– Kedar Naik, Director of Tourism

“ We have been made aware of the event and are keeping an eye on the situation. The arrival of such heavy equipment at night could disturb the turtles, especially since some have already returned without nesting

– Atmaram Gauns, Range Forest Officer, Wildlife

TRANCE FEST NIGHTMARE AT DREAM BEACH TURTLE SITE

Wildlife officials are concerned over the disruption caused to the turtles' nesting process. According to Atmaram Gauns, the Range Forest Officer, Wildlife, the department is closely monitoring the situation. "We have been made aware of the event and are keeping an eye on the situation. The arrival of such heavy equipment at night could disturb the turtles, especially since some have already returned without nesting," Gauns said.

"I have observed turtle tracks during my morning walks, and when the turtle guards are notified, they often find that

the turtles have left without nesting," shared Ramesh Naik, a member of the Anjuna-Caisua Biodiversity Board.

According to the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) 2019 Notification, sea turtle nesting beaches are classified as Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESA) and are categorised as CRZ1.

Local resident Javish Moniz has actively campaigned for Dream Beach to be officially declared a turtle nesting site, citing the significant number of Olive Ridley turtles that have come ashore in recent years. In a letter to the Range Forest Officer in March 2024, Moniz had placed this request, which he repeated in a second letter on February 10 this year. "Since this endangered species faces a threat to their reproduction, I request you to take this seriously and notify the beach, or a part of it, for nesting purposes, along with a dedicated team from the Forest Department for patrolling of the beach."

Research from the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) also supports the need for protection, noting that sea turtles often return to their natal beaches to lay eggs. "Genetic studies have confirmed that such return migrations do occur in several sea turtle populations," the CEE study states.

Kedar Naik, Director of Tourism, emphasised that no permission had been granted for any events on Dream Beach. "No requests for any festivals or parties have been submitted to us," he confirmed. A senior Forest Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity, added, "We will not allow such an event to happen, and if we become aware of any violations, we will take appropriate action."

The festival is reportedly organised by Mumbai resident Karan Manvantra, but attempts to reach him for comments were unsuccessful.

Wayanad hartal against elephant attacks

HD Bureau

KOZHIKODE

In response to continuing incidents of elephant attacks claiming human lives, the people of Wayanad have called for a dawn to dusk hartal on Wednesday.

The hartal call was made by the Farmers' Relief Forum, protesting the forest department's perceived failure to protect residents from escalating wildlife threats.

The victim of the latest attack was a man working on his farm. The incident adds to a series of human-wildlife conflicts in the region, which have become alarmingly frequent. The FRF's call for a hartal underscores the growing frustration among the farming community, who feel vulnerable to such dangers.

In a statement, the FRF criticized the forest department for not implementing effective measures to safeguard farmers, agricultural workers, and indigenous communities from wild animal incursions. They emphasized the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to prevent further tragedies.

Wayanad, known for its rich biodiversity, has witnessed a surge in human-animal conflicts, particularly involving elephants. Factors such as habitat loss, deforestation, and encroachment into forested areas have been identified as primary contributors to these incidents. The local populace has repeatedly urged authorities to devise and implement solutions to mitigate these conflicts.

The district has a history of protests related to wil-

dlife attacks. In February 2024, following the death of a 47-year-old man due to an elephant attack near Mananthavady, widespread demonstrations erupted. Agitated residents took to the streets, demanding immediate action from authorities to address the increasing threats posed by wild animals. The protests highlighted the community's exasperation and the pressing need for effective interventions.

In another instance, in November 2024, both the United Democratic Front and the Left Democratic Front called for a hartal in Wayanad. This protest was in response to the alleged delay by the central government in providing special assistance for the rehabilitation of landslide-affected areas in the district. The hartal also aimed to condemn the perceived neglect of landslide survivors, reflecting the political dimensions intertwined with environmental and safety concerns in the region.

The recurring nature of these incidents and the subsequent protests underscore a pattern of administrative challenges and the community's demand for accountability. The FRF's current hartal call is a continuation of the district's ongoing struggle to balance human habitation with wildlife conservation.

Authorities have acknowledged the severity of the situation. In previous discussions, measures such as enhanced fencing, changes in vegetation to deter elephants, and the use of technology for early warning systems were proposed.

■ Dogs ravage prey base ■ Experts sound alarm, state forest department to sterilise dogs

Wild dogs push Gangotri's snow leopards to the brink

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH
DEHRADUN, FEB. 11

Rare snow leopards population in Gangotri National Park, Uttarakhand is facing an existential challenge, as dogs in the park are attacking their prey base.

The state forest department is now planning to sterilise the dogs, to prevent depleting food stock of snow leopards in the park.

Dogs have become a big threat for the snow leopards in GNP, as they are killing the red foxes

Himalayan Goral, Bhurals and other wild animals, which are considered to be the main food for the snow leopards in the park area.

Herds of dogs making kills in large numbers have worried the national park management. Concerned over the shrinking prey base of the big cats, the park management with the guidance of state forest department and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is now working on a plan to sterilise the dogs in the park area.

Earlier, following a

request from the GNP management, the WII studied the situation and expressed concern over rising population of dogs in the park area. WII, in its recommendations, suggested the state forest department and the park management to sterilise the dogs, to control their population rise inside the park forest area.

State forest officials in Dehradun informed that the GNP is working over an action plan to sterilise the dogs. Officials stated that the sterilisation plan will be implemented in the



guidance of WII and state forest department.

It's notable that the GNP is considered to be the home of rare snow leopards found mainly above 3000 meters height in the Himalayas. According to the state forest depart-

ment records, present population of snow leopard in the GNP is nearly 40.

In high altitude areas of the Himalayas, main source of food for snow leopards are animals like bhural, kakar, Himalayan goral and other herbivores. However, food stock of the snow leopard is constantly depleting for some time due to ever increasing number of dogs in the park.

These dogs mostly look for their food near the camps of Indian Army, Indo Tibet Border Police (ITBP) and border road

organisation.

With substantial rise in their population, these dogs are now frequently attacking the leopards' prey base. Several kills made by dogs were captured in camera installed by WII in the national park.

The WII has also sounded alert that shrinking prey base for the snow leopards will put question mark on the existence of the higher Himalayas big cats. According to the WII warning, it can even lead to extinction of the snow leopards.