

Man-animal conflict in core

Biswajeet Banerjee ■
Kishanpur (Kheri)

Please help, a tiger has killed my nephew and the Forest Department is doing nothing to protect the villagers, *lungi*-clad Lakhan Singh, in his 50s, told a num-

ber of senior officers in Tanda village nestled almost in the middle of the core forest area. The tiger had made three kills, all children, aged between 8 and 15, last fortnight forcing people to stay indoors.

District forest officials and policemen, all armed with guns, descended on the

village where the tiger was sighted just half-an-hour ago. The pug marks of the errant cat were fresh, and these were testimony to the fact that the tiger had loitered around the area for quite some time before going into a ravine along the Sharda river.

Silence descended on the scene on witnessing the pug marks. Whistling winds blowing through the farmland interspersed with the whispering of senior forest officials, who were chalking out a strategy to protect villagers from the marauding tiger.

The officials believed that the tiger was just within range. The freshness of the pug marks made them believe that the tiger was still prowling around and would be hiding in the grass land that mingled with the sugarcane crop grown by the villagers in the ravines of the Sharda river.

"Please save us from this tiger who regularly comes here ... it will eat us one by one," Lakhan Singh said almost on the top of his voice. The official asks the guards to take him away but Singh continued to shout realising there were some journalists who had come to cover the on-going conflict between the man and the animal.

The foresters made a plan to tie a bait for the tiger. The strategy was that if the tiger eats the bait it would not venture into the villages, "It is a real struggle between man and animal in which we have to save both," District Forest Officer (North Kheri) KK Singh said.

Fear stalked the village that has a population of over 500. There are three primary schools but children no longer go there as the teachers have stopped coming to the schools fearing the tiger. The villagers have stopped irrigating the wheat crop while women folk have stopped going out to the forest to collect fuel wood.

"Who will risk his life when the 'sher' (tiger) is around," Narendra Singh, a resident of Kaap Tanda village told this reporter. Singh's mother Jasodha Devi is the



gram pradhan of three villages that lie almost at the centre of the core forest area.

With schools not functioning children are deprived of their nutritional food that comes in form of the mid-day meal scheme. "Yahan par na chori ka dar, na dacoity ka. Dar keval sher ka hai" (We do not fear thieves or dacoits in this area. The only fear is of the tiger), Singh said.

Incidentally, the village is not a tribal village. It is the lure of lucre that has forced the people to illegally acquire forest land. The area here is fertile and the land in local parlance is called 'sona'. This land is known to give a good produce with minimum labour and investment. This is the reason why the area is famous for sugarcane, wheat and paddy production.

The journey to the village was not easy. It is situated almost in the middle of the core forest region of Kishanpur range. Driving through the rutted roads of the dense forest of 'saal' and teak for almost seven kilometres one reaches the open space with clusters of houses made of mud walls and thatched roof on one side and almost endless fields on the other side. Acres and acres of land had fresh wheat crops with stalks popping out... Only the multi-coloured scarecrows interspersed these

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छटा तल, जवाहर भवन, लखनऊ

संख्या:एम0ई0-2/मर्ती/09/3434 लखनऊ:दिनांक: 29 जनवरी, 2009

*** साक्षात्कार विज्ञापित ***

इस कार्यालय की पूर्व विज्ञापित संख्या-एम0ई0-2/मर्ती/09/3340, दिनांक 19 जनवरी, 2009 जिसके द्वारा मेडिकल कालेज, इलाहाबाद के स्टाफ नर्स (महिला) के पदों पर चयन हेतु आवेदन पत्र आमंत्रित किये गये हैं। उक्त पद हेतु प्राप्त आवेदन पत्रों में से अर्ह अभ्यर्थियों का दिनांक 11 फरवरी, 2009 से साक्षात्कार प्रारम्भ होगा, अर्ह अभ्यर्थियों की सूची कार्यालय के सूचना पट्ट पर चर्या कर दी जायेगी। साक्षात्कार में सम्मिलित होने हेतु पृथक से कोई सूचना प्रेषित नहीं की जायेगी। साक्षात्कार में उपस्थित होने हेतु कोई भी यात्रा भत्ता अनुमन्य नहीं होगा। साक्षात्कार में नियत तिथि पर उपस्थित न होने वाले अभ्यर्थियों के बारे में बाद में कोई भी विचार नहीं किया जायेगा।

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e forest area



green fields.

"It is all forest area that has been illegally acquired by these people many decades ago. They are in fact living inside the region meant for tigers. And if now the tiger is attacking them we are asking for excuses," KK Singh said.

Just a few meters below the farm land in the Sharda ravine, sugarcane is grown. People were attacked when they had gone there to cut the crop. All the three people who were killed by the tiger, had died near sugarcane crop.

The scene is almost same in Faizabad, around 200 south-east of Kheri, where the tiger felled three persons. Foresters say the tiger that strayed from Dudhwa Tiger Reserve. Villagers there too have stopped venturing out fearing an attack from the tiger.

"The situation is bad. People are agitated. If no immediate step is taken people would kill the tiger," Manoj Mishra, a government official in Kumarganj said.

The body of Raghuraj Pasi (45) of Mubarakpur was found in the forest near Bewta nullah. This was the tiger's second human kill in four days. On January 10, one Sirju of Godianpurwa village was killed. Bajrang Singh, who was an eyewitness to the incident, said Raghuraj had taken the team appointed to

kill the predator to the spot which the tiger visited frequently.

The forest officials managed to run to safety when the tiger attacked but Raghuraj was dragged into the forest. The forest officials reportedly did not disclose the incident to their seniors. However, Bajrang Singh informed the villagers and hundreds of them gathered at the village panchayat and did not allow the district officials to send the body of the deceased for post mortem.

Realising that tempers were running high the state government had given an order to kill the tiger. The Forest Department had constituted special squads for killing the man-eater which has claimed four lives since date.

In the last three months of its prowling from Pilibhit to Faizabad via Barabanki, it has killed four persons eating up the middle portion of their bodies, he said.

"These attacks are not due to the fall out of prey-predator equation ... these attacks are due to human interference in the jungle. More the interference there are possibility of more attack," Convener Terai Nature Conservation of Society Dr VP Singh said.

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