

Minutes of the Meeting of Environment Help Line held on 3rd December, 2015

The 3rd meeting of the Environment Help line was held on 3rd December, 2015 at NCHSE to discuss the **causes and consequences of man–animal conflict arising out of expansion of Bhopal city**, especially of frequent sighting of tigers in Kerwa, Kaliasote, Nabibagh areas of Bhopal.

The meeting was chaired by Mrs. Nirmala Buch, Chairperson of NCHSE. Dr. Suhas Kumar, PPCF was invited to throw light on the vexed issue. Dr. Kumar attended the meeting entirely in his personal capacity to share his personal views on the reasons, consequences and possible strategies. The list of participants is at Annex I.

Points emerged from the discussion are as follows:

1. Issue and the consequences:

Dr Sumas Kumar explained that the City of Bhopal sits within a tiger habitat and in the last 15 years the city has grown rapidly eating further into the wilderness - fragmenting and destroying tiger's home. He further elaborated that the city of Bhopal is surrounded by a garland of forested habitat. Though, this habitat is fragmented at places by the human habitations and developmental infrastructures, the tigers still can move throughout this garland taking advantages of nalas, and riparian vegetation (along the river banks).

He further said that the Ratapani sanctuary, which is about 43 km of Bhopal, is a secure habitat where tigers have been breeding. Over the years the habitat has improved and the number of tigers has increased, necessitating young tigresses and tigers to move out from within the sanctuary boundary to the forests outside the reserve to find suitable breeding and foraging places. Dr. Kumar said that movement of tigers in Kerwa has been reported every year since 1996, it is another matter that in those times media was not so proactive to seek out tigers and publish the news about tigers nor the Kerwa area was so full of academic institutions , human colonies and a heavy tourist inflow then. The only change in the behavior of tigers that we see now is that some tigresses have begun using Kerwa and Smardha forests for breeding and raising cubs.

It also emerged that the media continue to portray the tigers as a grave danger and fails to comprehend the real and bigger threats to the city dwellers from the rising other animals. According to Dr Suhas city people are more prone to contacting rabies from a huge population of stray dogs as well as their pet dogs and cats and getting a deadly bite from the snakes that have become more active as their dwelling holes and crevices are being dug out and destroyed by colonizers. He reported that around 46,000 people die each year due to snake bite in India. He explained that on the other hand the tigers around Bhopal pose a marginal threat, possibly much less than the rising number of criminals in the city, in fact, tigers are themselves seriously threatened by humans.

Tigers are not the intruders in Bhopal; it is the man which is encroaching upon the tiger habitat through unplanned development in green areas. Dr. Kumar said 'No' to

any suggestion that involves shifting all tigers inhabiting Kerwa and Samardha forests to other areas. The reason is obvious, once a tiger is removed from the area, the dispersing tigers from Ratapani will occupy the vacant territory. Moreover, reportedly at the moment no area is left where the tigers from outside could be safely released. He said that we have to create such safe release areas to accommodate tigers that are threatened by human intolerance.

Regarding declaration of Ratapani forest as a Tiger Reserve, Dr. Kumar opined that it would be the most logical step to follow, but it may take some time to materialize.

2. Strategies to resolve the issue:

From the deliberations that followed the presentation by Dr Suhas Kumar, it emerged that all the major stakeholders should collaborate with each other to implement a well laid strategy, which may include –

- i. Town & Country Planning Directorate should plan the expansion of the city rationally in order to preserve the garland of green belt around Bhopal. No construction in these areas should be allowed.
- ii. Forest Department should identify all movement paths that a tiger might use to stray into human dwellings, fence these areas off with a combination of mesh-wire and solar power fence. Both types of fences would need intensive up keep and monitoring.
- iii. Forest Department should train and place at least 6 professional teams to monitor and report tiger moment 24X7 outside Ratapani sanctuary, and issue timely alerts.
- iv. Forest Department should identify suitable potential tiger habitats outside protected areas (PAs) (in territorial divisions and buffer zones), carry out required habitat augmentation work to enhance prey base, build capacity of the staff and equip them in a way to combat wildlife crime and monitor tigers in their areas. Once this is achieved the wildlife wing may be able to rehabilitate tigers straying out into towns in such potential habitats.
- v. Forest Department should take action to improve habitat protection and development of grasslands in Kerwa, Kathotiya Ratapani, Badi and Samradha forest and augment water sources where necessary in these areas. Once the habitat improves they may translocate herbivores (chital) from PAs with surplus chital population.
- vi. There is need for creating public awareness regarding tiger, their need and behavior so that informed citizens should react sensibly towards tigers. Forest department may invite voluntary organizations to participate in this programme.
- vii. Media bulletin at regular intervals may be issued, place them on the website/social network and circulate to the educational institutions to create awareness rather than prompting people to rush to the sites of reported sighting, because tigers need lesser interference from man.

3. Role of Environment Helpline:

1. It would facilitate implementation of awareness programme to sensitize the citizens of Bhopal to enlist their participation/cooperation so that the informed

citizens reacts sensibly towards tigers and facilitate protection of tigers around Bhopal.

2. Bring out news bulletin at regular intervals focusing on environmental issues in Madhya Pradesh.

4. Other Issues

Following issues were also raised for detailed discussion at later stage:

1. Need and viability of Metro rail, which reportedly might replace the existing BRTS in Bhopal.
2. Causes and remedy of farmer's suicide in Madhya Pradesh, which has won the Best Agriculture State Award in 2012, Krishi Karmanya Award in 2011-12 & 2012-13 and other Agriculture productivity awards.



Pradip Nandi

Member, Environment helpline

Annex -I

List of participants of the meeting on Environment Help Line held on 3rd December 2015

1. Mrs. Nirmala Buch, Chairperson, NCHSE, Bhopal
2. Mr. Narendra Prasad, Former DGP, MP
3. Mr. L.S. Hardenia, Senior journalist, Bhopal
4. Mr. Chandra Kant Naidu, Sr Journalist, Bhopal
5. Dr. Suhas Kumar, PCCF, NVDA(Member, Environment)
6. Prof Rekha Singhal, IIFM
7. Mr. Harish K. Bhawnani, Convenor, Bhopal Citizens' Forum
8. Wg Crd D K Dixit, Bhopal Citizens' Forum
9. Mr. Sunil Deshpande, Director, Institute of Quality Management & Research
10. Ms. Rashmi Saraswat, Gereral Secretary, MCM, Bhopal
11. Mr. Raghuraj Singh, Incharge- Communication & Microfinance, MCM, Bhopal
12. Dr D. D. Banerjee, Director, NCHSE
13. Dr Pradip Nandi, Sr. Fellow, NCHSE, Bhopal
14. Mr. Avinash Shrivastava, Dy Director, NCHSE