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Good news for the tiger?

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The Hindu On the fasttrack: Project Tiger. Photo: K. Murali Kumar

Not really. Over the last three years, notified tiger forests have seen a 22 per cent compensation for the tribals living in these areas has only turned these forests in

Jairam Ramesh, the indefatigable Minister for Environment and Forests, exhorted on July 15, 2010 to 'consider the possibility of proposing the Sathyamangalam Wildlife Sanctuary à-vis the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972' as 'the area is contiguous to Bandipur-Mudumalai'. This came on cue and with clockwork precision after tiger numbers had doubled to 18 in a year. The ground was prepared when a gazette notified Sathyamangalam in Guthiyalathur and Talamalai Forests, an area of 524.35 sq km in 2008 itself.

Connecting corridor

The Sathyamangalam forest division is contiguous to the Biligirirangan Temple Wildlife Sanctuary in Chamaraajanagar District of Karnataka. This forest links the Eastern and West

Mudumalai, the 872.24 sq km Bandipur and the 643.35 sq km Nagarhole Crit remains now is the 344 sq km Wayanad Wild Life Sanctuary. Together, this is an elephant habitat in the country! Already, the proposal to notify 580 sq km of the Sanctuary as a CTH has been approved close on the heels of the approvals in Maharashtra, Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh and Ratapani in Madhya Pradesh.

The 25,551 sq km of tiger forests in 2007 rapidly expanded to 32,878 sq km, in three years! The number of Tiger Reserves jumped from 28 to 39, spread over vast 11,029.0781 sq km in just 13 CTHs. There are 26 more yet to figure out that coexisted with tigers are to be pushed out from the CTH. The 2006 amendment of the CTH to be 'inviolable', freed of all human activity. Once depopulated, the tiger enclosures for the exclusive delight of the prosperous class for whose 'development' wildlife are primarily decimated.

Jairam Ramesh in his press statement of May 4, 2010 was categorical: 'there is no tourism in tiger reserves. In fact, he assures us that 'tourism is essential' for the tiger conservation. Project Tiger Reserves, particularly in core areas, will be strictly regulated'. Wildlife tourism industry and the self-proclaimed wild-lifers, who normally never cohabit with these 'inviolable' areas. A new tiger-forest dependent community for their livelihoods has emerged. All human activity CTH! You might say it is an oxymoron; it surely is!

On the fast track

Tigers spell money and lots of them. From a mere Rs. 12 crores per year during 2007-08, it leapfrogged to Rs. 201.53 crores during 2009-10. Project Tiger got fast-tracked as a government obsession and pride.

It all started in early 2005 when the tigers in Sariska of Rajasthan turned out to be a dead end. The tigers had all vanished. By then Rs. 2 crores had already been spent on the project. The influential urbanites, took the government to task. The result was 'Joining the 2005 Report of the five-member Tiger Task Force. It found that the current approach was simply not the answer. The forest and wildlife bureaucracy relationship with the tiger's habitat had turned from bad to worse; less than 10 per cent of the families were left. The simmering anger was a sure recipe for disaster for both conservation and development.

The Manmohan Singh government quickly moved in within months of the disaster to bring an amendment to the rather colonial and archaic anti-people Wildlife Protection Act to create the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Tiger Reserves, until then an administrative one, became a statutory one. The Left parties in the Parliament introduced the amendment determining CTHs. This itself was an outcome of the raging misplaced tribalism and the introduction of Forest Rights Act in the Parliament in 2005. The rapidly swelling tribalism forced the political parties and the governments to sit up and concede that a 'tribal forest' was for the forest peoples. They agreed to resolve this once and for all. The Forest Rights Act, the decolonisation of forest legislations, was the outcome. It influenced the amendment of the Wildlife Protection Act in 2006.

Everything seemed to be going swell; the number of tigers was increasing, and finally their traditional rights in the forest were recognised and that they were no longer upsetting this flagship political project of tribal and tiger of the UPA government.

constituted National Tiger Conservation Authority went about systematically : hard it seems!

Bypassing the law

The law requires that CTHs are notified through a public consultation, with the consent of forest dwellers in the area, and an agreed-upon relocation pack declarations of areas as “critical tiger habitats” and “buffer zones”. The forest l instead by-passed all these and notified CTHs, mostly in December 2007 itself. Rights Act itself has been tardy in all the three southern states with none getti

Unrest spread throughout Mudumalai with protests, bandhs and blockades pe a lakh tribals protested on the streets of Gudalur in Nilgiris. The Soligas of Bil have vowed to oppose the CTH declaration. Wayanad has long history of Adiv has seen protests against eviction and non-compliance with the Forest Rights spreading unrest? The largest tiger habitat has been successfully turned into a bureaucracy endangering both the tribals and the tigers.

Keywords: [tiger conservation](#), [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act](#)



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