

Maoists' strike Similipal again

Date : 6 April, 2009

Peace continued to elude Simlipal with suspected Maoists going on the rampage inside the premier tiger reserve for the third time in a week on Saturday.

Forest officials said a group of armed men looted and ransacked a forest rest house and a tourist complex at Jamuani in the Similipal Tiger Reserve's Manda Range around Saturday midnight.

The attack came exactly eight days after Maoists went on a rampage at Chahala by setting fire to a forest rest house and assaulting tourists and officials.

Earlier on Saturday, another group claiming themselves to be Maoists had raided the forest range office at Pithabata. The suspected rebels took away two logs and pasted pro-Maoist posters in and around the range office. The posters warned forest officials of dire consequences if they did not quit Simlipal. The attackers also burst crackers in a bid to create a fear psychosis among the unarmed officials.

The forest department, however suspects that the latest attacks were the handiwork of local poachers and members of the timber mafia. "The attackers appear to be emboldened by the previous Maoist attacks in Simlipal. They are trying to take advantage of the situation," a forest department official said on condition of anonymity.

The attacks coming just before the tribals annual hunting ritual on the occasion Pana Shankranti has left animal lovers and conservationists a worried lot. They said the tribals armed with bows and arrows and hunting axes enter the reserve through hidden paths and indulge in indiscriminate killing of the animals as part of their ritual of "akhand shikar" (mass hunting excursion).

Conservationists said poachers may take advantage of the Maoist attacks to indulge in intensified hunting on Pana Shagranti day.

Source : The Times of India.

Source : TNN MONDAY, APRIL 06, 2009.

Poet, lawyers united in Save Similipal cry

Date : 9 Apr 2009.

Press Reviews / News – Extracts - Reports
Download from www.concernforsimilipaltigerreserve.com

Shocked at the sight of Similipal's peril in the hands of poachers and timber pirates and lately by the Maoists, poets, litterateurs, lawyers and conservationists have launched the Save Simlipal Cry campaign.

Nimai Mohanty, an eminent Oriya poet and lyricist, and an akademi award winner , said Similipal has been the source of inspiration for many an Oriya poet. Radhanath Ray, Pandit Gopabandhu Das and Kalindi Charan panigrahi and some of the new generation poets have derived their poetic muse from Similipal's pristine beauty.

"Inspired by its cascading waterfalls, opulent mountains and their gorgeous peaks gurgling rivers, Bengali poet late Shakti Chattopadhyay and Orissa's internationally acclaimed poet Jayanta Mohapatra had also narrated splendor of Simlipal," Mohanty added.

"We do not need to go to Kashmir or Ooty to enjoy nature's beauty. Compared to other tourist spots, Simlipal stands fairer. We must preserve its virginity and protect it from intruders," the poet-cum –lyricist observed.

Former V-C of North Orissa University and currently the president of the Mayurbhanj chapter of the INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritages) Probodh Kumar Mishra said the massacre the unleashed by Maoists, poachers and timber pirates posed a serious threat to this unique hill forest and its endangered flora and fauna.

"Natures most precious gift to Orissa is Simlipal. It protects the ecology of not only Orissa, but also of Jharkhand, West Bengal and Chattishgarh. Besides threats from Maoists, poachers and timber prates, the government committed yet another mistake by opening the park to eco-tourism. The government must retrace its steps so that the forest is saved from further peril," the INTACH chief observed.

President of the District Bar Association Srinivash Pradhan said the government's apathy is inexcusable. Nature may strike back in fury if the authorities do not make haste," Pradhan said.

On a more lighter note, wildlife enthusiast and retired faculty member of the Zoology department of MPC College , Baripada, Bhabagrahi Mohanty said, "If the tigers of Similipal have had the right to exercise their franchise, they would have voted for shifting of the villages from the core area of the park. Probably then the government would take immediate action to save the Park.

Source : The Times of India., Amarendra Bose, TNN

Enemies Within

Date : Apr 25, 2009

A savage attack by profiteering Naxals has almost broken the back of a major tiger reserve, says PRERNE SINGH BINDRA. IN HAPPIER times, this was the best hour of the day to be at Chahala in the heart of Similipal Tiger Reserve in Orissa. As the fading rays of the sun filtered through the canopy, animals would gather at the salt lick for their daily dose of minerals. Cheetal, sambar, elephants. Predators followed prey the

Press Reviews / News – Extracts - Reports
Download from www.concernforsimilipaltigerreserve.com

occasional leopard, and just a few days back – the royal Bengal Tiger had made its rare appearance.

There is nothing here now, no sign of life. The silence is eerie, not a reflection of the peace that is a blessing of the forest. We take in the devastation: the range office has been reduced to cinders, the wireless system smashed, wildlife monitoring registers burnt to ash, motorcycles burnt, the rest house furniture, toilets demolished. It couldn't get worse. It does.

The bark of a dog shatters the deathly stillness. We follow the sound to catch a party of hunters armed with bows and arrows, spears and charra, the local gun. We give them the chase but they are just too fast, and too familiar with the forest. Our worst fear has been proved true. With Similipal virtually abandoned, poachers are having a field day at the reserve.

We had gone to Similipal following the news that Naxals had struck the tiger reserve at 8.30 pm on March 28, 2009. The attack continued through the night and a week thereafter. The first strike was a masterpiece. The main wireless tower at Meghasani, Similipal's highest peak was destroyed, effectively cutting off communication. Forest chowkis, vehicles, rest houses were ransacked and burnt, rangers and forest guards were tied and beaten, as were the tourists. Posters demanding the "death of Project Tiger" and threats to burn the forest were put up. The attacks were across the 3000 square km reserve though concentrated at its most vulnerable points – Chahala, Upper Barhakamuda, Devasthali, Gudgudia, Patbil, Jenabil, Joranda – all in the critical core area where virtually all the wildlife is concentrated.

The forest department fled the field. "We were told not to come back to our posts, else we would be killed," says Narhari Naik, a forest guard and witness to the carnage. Obviously none of the forest staff has dared return, and there are just two units of the Special Operation Group that stand guard at two posts inside most of the park- specifically the core lies unattended. Similipal one of our largest and finest tiger reserves is open for loot.

"At your own risk," we are warned when we put forth the proposal of going inside to the authorities. There may still be some movement of Naxals, there could be landmines- they didn't know. We cover some vital

SAVE SIMLIPAL

Wildlife experts demand para-military forces be deployed

In the long run create a dedicated Wildlife Protection Force along the lines of para-military forces

Equip and train forest department.
Fill staff shortage

Villages within the reserve, especially the core, must be rehabilitated

areas – Nawana, skrit Joranda, removes trees that block our way to Gudgudia from Chahala, and though we try to make our way to Upper Barhakamuda, we are told the bridge has been blown up.

The sequence of events the damage and talking with locals officials and the police shows a clear pattern. The motive is clear – the carnage was aimed to break the back of forest administration and thereby ‘free’ the forest of any control whatsoever. The timing of the attack is suspiciously too, on the eve of the akhand shikar- a month-long annual ritual of the local tribals who go on a mass hunting spree armed with indigenous weaponry, killing everything in sight. And on the eve of elections when the concentration of the police is solely on election duty. Forces for any other purpose-however vital- are simply unavailable. The field is clear now. Not just for akhand shikar- but for poachers who have been targeting Simlipal constantly over the years. Forest officials admit there has been “serious loss” in tiger numbers, and no less than eight to 10tuskers are killed every year.

THE ATTACK had local support say police officials. And it served a dual purpose – by clearing the ground for akhand shikar it sent a clear message to the locals that the Naxals were with them, thus paving the way to establish themselves in Simlipal. “Most activities of the forest – dwellers were anti-conservation – be it ritual hunting, tree – felling etc. thus nurturing a hostility vis-a-vis the forest department. The Naxals have exploited and used it to their purpose,” points out a police official (who did not want to be named). Worryingly, it also leaves the field clear for the illegal trade of timber and sal patta trade. This business running into crores will help finance Naxal activity, as it has in other extremist –ridden areas. Naxals sheltering in forests, and deriving their finances from trading in forest produced and, to a certain extent, wildlife derivatives like ivory, rhino horn, tiger skins etc is a pan- Indian phenomenon.

The local villages are reluctant almost hostile when we speak to them. Most assert that they are fine with the

Forest chowkis, vehicles were burnt. Rangers, forest guards and tourists were tied and

Press Reviews / News – Extracts - Reports
Download from www.concernforsimlipaltigerreserve.com

forest department and wash their hands of the current mayhem. “I was first asleep, after a good drink of hadiya,” says Mata Alda of Lanjhagesra village near Gudgudia – though say police sources this was the same village that had held a huge meeting barely a month back as a show of strength against the forest department. It is suspected that Naxal elements were also present.

The current siege is however only the latest blow to a Problem –ridden Simlipal – the final straw that will destroy the park unless we act now. The attack was a result of a meticulous plan, indicating Naxal presence in the park for a considerable period, though their presence went unnoticed, a tragic failure on the part of the forest department. Forest officials express their helplessness – Nagaraja Reddy the Simlipal director, says they are understaffed and unequipped. At present to man the entire reserve there are barely 40 guards most nearing retiring age. “We had no choice but to surrender,” says Reddy.

Naxals deriving finances from trading in forest produce is a pan-Indian phenomenon, say intelligence sources.

Have we “surrendered” Simlipal and our national animal then? As things stand now, yes.

And as the state flees it seems the Naxals are here to stay. And the forests, are now sanctuary to Naxals – not to the tigers.

Source : Tehelka Magazine, Vol 6, Issue16.

Maoist leader produced in court

Date : 5/8/2009.

Top Maoist leader Bhaskar Patra and three of his accomplices, arrested by Keonjhar police on Thursday were produced in a local court on Friday.

Patra confessed that he masterminded the series of Naxalite attacks in Simlipal Tiger Reserve (STR) during March and April, a police official said. He had also planned to disrupt poll proceeding in Keonjhar. “We had planned to disrupt elections in Keonjhar,” admitted Patra.

The arrest of patra came as a major boost to the police in the anti-naxalite operation. His other arrested associates were, Tirtha basi Deuri, Manoj Kuldi and Suresh Maharana. Police also seized live cartridges from their possession.

“Patra was a hardcore Maoist leader spreading his network in Jajpur, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal and some parts of mayurbhanj districts. We also seized bullets and a map from them,” Keonjhar SP, Soumendra Priyadarshi said.

Source : OTV Bureau.

Tribal hunters attempt to sneak Simlipal foiled

Thursday, May 14 2009.

Forest officials along with a team of Special Operation Group (SOG) commandos and a posse of Armed police Reserve (ARP) today foiled an attempt of hundreds of armed tribals to enter into the Simlipal reserve for mass hunting.

Simlipal Tiger Reserve (STR) officials said over 250 tribal shikaris armed with bows, arrows and 'tangia' (hunting axe) made an abortive attempt to sneak into the animal-rich areas of patbil and Debasthali located in the core area of the reserve.

Acting on a tip-off, the SOG commandos and APR jawans led by the forest officials chased away the shikaris from Kendumundi and Thakurmunda range areas from where they had planned to sneak into the animal-rich areas like Debasthali and Patbil.

This was perhaps the biggest abortive plan for 'mass hunting excursion' (Akhand Shikar ritual) organized by the tribals after the Maoists' rampage in the STR on March 29 last.

The shikaris were emboldened by the absence of the field staff of the reserve inside the core area after the Maoists' rampage. STR sources said the field staff who were now keeping a round –the –clock vigil on the fringe areas of the 'core' and the 'buffer' could know about today's mass hunting excursion plan and foiled it.

Source : --UNI – 14CA36.xml.

Orissa Police arrested 3 Maoists involved in Nayagarh , Similipal attack

Wednesday, May 27, 2009

Three Maoists aged between 21-25 and allegedly involved in Nayagarh and Similipal attack were arrested from Kaliapani area. Jajpur Police Superintendent D.S. Kutey said the arrested Maoists are Mita (23) alias Sanjaya Gagarai and Silu Champia(25). They were arrested during a joint point operation by special Operation Group jawans and Jajpur Police in Kaliapani jungle under Kaliapani Police station. Weapons, Maoists posters, banners and pamphlets were seized from them.

Source : orissadiary.com

Two Maoist nabbed from Similipal

Two suspected Maoists were arrested by Mayurbhanj police from the core area of the STR (Similipal Tiger Reserve). Police said they were involved in destroying the VHF (Very High Frequency) wireless system on March 28 and ransacking the forest rest house at UBK (Upper – Barha – Kamuda) and Nawna.

Press Reviews / News – Extracts - Reports
Download from www.concernforsimilipaltigerreserve.com

The arrested, identified as Telenga Ho (25) of Jamunagarh and Budu Ho (26) of Jenabil, said in their confessional statement that they were unhappy with the STR officials move to displace them from the core area of the reserve.

In a bid to frustrate the move for displacement, they had joined the Maoist groups from Keonjhar and Jajpur.

Later, both were produced before the SDJM Karanjia who had remanded them to jail custody.

A police team from Baripada that was commissioned by the Mayurbhanj Superintendent of Police, Dayal Ganwar, was engaged in a special combing operation during the past two days that led to the arrest of the two youths, police sources said.

Source : UNI, News India, July 1, 2009

Maoists involved in Similipal attack held

Two Maoists, allegedly involved in the attack on Similipal sanctuary about three months ago, were arrested in Orissa's Mayurbhanj district, police said today; The ultras were nabbed at Lambugada under Jashipore Police station, by the anti – naxal special operation group (sog) of Orissa Police yesterday, Superintendent of Police, Mayurbhanj, Dayal Gangwar said.

The duo identified as Mata Tiria (55) and Abiram Adeya (45) confessed that they were involved in the March 28 violence in the forest range office at Chahala inside the sprawling sanctuary and nine subsequent incidents forcing the government to issue a ban on entry of tourists inside. The Maoists along with local people had vandalized the forest at Chahala, forest beat houses at Khejuir and Cherabila besides looting the belongings of the tourists.

They confessed before the police that cadres operating in Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Jajpur district were behind the violence by motivating the tribals inhabiting the sanctuary to take to violence. Gangwar said. Both the red rebels were produced before the court of sub – divisional magistrate at Karanjia which forwarded them jail custody.

Source : PTI, dt. July Sunday 5, 2009

Mayurbhanj Police arrested three hardcore Maoists

Press Reviews / News – Extracts - Reports
Download from www.concernforsimilipaltigerreserve.com

Reported by Orissadiary correspondence ; Mayurbhanj; The Mayurbhanj police has arrested three hardcore Maoists involved in the attacked on different guest houses in Similipal Wildlife sanctuary in Mayurbhanj district recently.

According to the district Superintendent of Police Dayal Gangwar, over 16 case are registered against Abhiram Hansda (25) of Padadiha Police station in Kaptipada, Budiram Patri (25) and Masukh Allian (40) of village Jashipore. The trio was involved in attack on Meghasuni wireless centre attack on Similipal on March'29 this year. On the next day, they attacked the Upper Barakama Tiger reserve range office. The trio was nabbed in a raid on a bus, police said. Earlier, two Maoists, involved in the Similipal sanctuary about three month ago, were arrested by the police on July 4. The ultras were nabbed at Lambugada under Jashipore Police Station. The duo identified as Mata Tiria (55) and Abhiram Adeya (45) had confessed that they were involved in the March 28 violence in the forest range office at Chahala.

Source : Orissadiary, July 14, 2009

Source : Indian Express, July 19, 2009

Timber mafias, poachers plunder forest resources in Orissa's Similipal Tiger Reserve

Similipal Tiger Reserve in the district of Mayurbhanj was declared as a Tiger Reserve in 1973 by Government of India under Project Tiger to save the declining tiger population of India. It is spread over 2800 sq. kms and is the source of many rivers of Mayurbhanj and Balasor district. As per the Forest department census figures the Reserve had 61 Tigers when the count was conducted in January 2009.

The total area of this SBR is 5,569 sq kms. Similipal is the home to 94 species of orchid and about 3000 species of other plants.

These include two species of orchids, which are endemic, eight plants which are endangered, eight species whose status in vulnerable and 34 other rare species of plants. Similipal is famous for its tiger population. The identified species of fauna include 12 species of amphibians, 29 species of reptiles, 264 species of birds and 42 species of mammals, al of which collectively highlight the Biodiversity of Similipal. Recently SBR was included in UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserve...

Timber mafias an poachers were out to plunder forest resources in absence of surveillance teams in the aftermath of Naxal attack on government establishments in famous Similipal Biosphere Reserve (SBR) in Mayurbhanj district. Since March 28 this year, Forest Department officials have deserted their duty posts apprehending attack by left wing extremists and this helped timber mafias and poachers take full advantage of the situation, alleged Mayurbhanj Forum at a press conference here on Sunday.

Press Reviews / News – Extracts - Reports
Download from www.concernforsimilipaltigerreserve.com

The forum comprising of concerned citizens of the district said tree felling and hunting of wildlife had been rampant during past couple of months. It displayed images of destructions inside SBR.

“ One or Two blasts by Naxalites shattered everything. It is very painful to witness fast depletion of forest and wildlife resources which have been conserved for decades in Similipal” said Bibhu Prasad Das of the forum. Mr. Das said large scale felling of trees was noticed in Lambugada Forest, Dhuduruchampa and Baliguda under Nawna forest range of this Biosphere Severed limbs of Wildboar and Sambar, even of elephants spotted under Pithabata range during frequent visits of teams sent by the forum, he alleged.

Mayurbhanj Forum demanded immediate restoration surveillance mechanism for protecting resources of this unique biodiversity.

“ Either paramilitary forces should be deployed or forest personnel with increased strength should return to do the duty to prevent further plunder,” said Bhanumitra Acharya here. The State government had also mooted deployment of a CRPF battalion to keep poachers at bay.

Source : Orissadiary, report by Dipti Ranjan Kanungo. Bhubaneswar, Monday
July 27, 2009

Similipal Tiger Reserve faces poaching threat

March 18, 2010, Kolkata.

The threat of poaching has increased in the Similipal Tiger Reserve in Orissa which houses 25 tigers as per the last census.

In March last year, Maoists damaged three forest range offices, beat up tourists and burnt down forest departments, which boost of considerable animal presence.

The Similipal Tiger Reserve in Orissa faces increased danger of poaching after it closed last year following Maoist violence and assault on forest guards.

“After the Maoist attack in Similipal in march last year, the National Park and Tiger Reserve is yet to reopen due to lack of adequate security forces. Central forces promised are yet to arrive,” field director of STR Harishankar Upadhyay said.

The threat of poaching has increased in the reserve which houses 25 tigers as per the last census, Mr. Upadhyay said, adding that of the 65 anti-poaching camps only 40 are now functioning.

Forest guards, who fled after the Maoists violence are gradually returning and confidence building measuring have been taken up as they are still scared , he said. “But, if Maoist violence continues in Similipal no forest staff will remain there.

Press Reviews / News – Extracts - Reports
Download from www.concernforsimilipaltigerreserve.com

“There have been instances of poaching of deer, but not of tigers.”

In march last year, Maoists damaged three forest range offices, beat up tourists and forest staff and burnt down forest department establishments at Chahala, Dhudruchampa and Upper Barahkamuda, which boast of considerable animal presence and are located in the core area.

The STR field director said at present two police camps are located in the Upper Barakumda range and Gudgudia range, but deployment of adequate forces and extensive combing operation are required.

Asked whether Maoists posed a threat to tigers and other animals, he said, “Since the forest personnel are scared, the protection of animals is affected.”

Asked whether he has taken up the matter with the Orissa government, he said it is aware of it.

On the re-opening of the tiger reserve for tourists, he said the decision would be taken after deployment of central forces.

Mr. Upadhyay said a positive development was that one of the four villages inside the core area of the reserve has been shifted last week from Jenabil to Amdiah near Udla in Mayurbhanj district.

Altogether 61 families have been relocated from Jenabil. Each family has been given a Rs 10 lakh package as per the rules of National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

Mr. Upadhyay said three villages – Kabatghai, Jamunagarh and Bakua – are still located inside the core area and steps are being taken to locate them also.

Altogether 35 families are living in Kabatghai, 26 in Jamunagarh and 61 in Bakua, he said.

Asked whether any time frame has been fixed for their relocation, he said it took 20 years to shift the Jenabil village.

“ Now our first priority is to settle the villages from Jenabil properly. Once they are settled properly, others from the remaining villages inside the core area will be encouraged to shift out of the park,” ha said.

Source : The Hindu.

Press Reviews / News – Extracts - Reports
Download from www.concernforsimilipaltigerreserve.com

