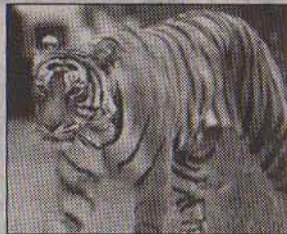


3 Bandhavgarh officials suspended for cover-up

RASHME SEHGAL

NEW DELHI

tigress death



May 26: Three forest officers have been suspended for allegedly attempting to cover up the killing of a 30-month-old tigress which died in the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh on May 19.

The tigress was crossing a road in the reserve along with her three cubs on the night of May 18 when a forest department jeep with SDO R.C. Pandey sitting in it allegedly hit it.

Without attending to the injured tigress, the officer scrambled back to his home and reported the matter to range officers Lalit Pandey

and J.N. Shukla. The trio allegedly misinformed their boss, reserve field director C.K. Patil, that the tigress had been wounded by a tourist vehicle or else sustained internal injuries in a fight with another tigress over territorial rights.

The injured animal was, however, spotted at 6 am

next morning by a group of tourists amongst whom was a senior police official belonging to the Maharashtra cadre who took photographs of the animal.

All the three forest officers tried putting the blame on the tourist jeep for hitting the tigress and may have succeeded in this ploy were it not for the intervention of the tell-tale photographs taken by the police official.

The local Bandhavgarh population, which is heavily dependent on tourism for their livelihood, also pressured Patil to have the forest department vehicles checked by forensic experts.

Environmentalist Dhruv Singh from Bandhavgarh

told this reporter on the phone, "Patil agreed to have the vehicles checked and when he realised his own officials were involved in a cover up, he suspended them immediately."

Mr Pandey has been accused of financial bungling and had been served with a transfer order. Mr Patil has ruled out the possibility of the tigress having been hit by the tourists jeep in the reserve.

Before the feline died, it entered a water body in Tala range, Mr Patil said, adding there was no external injury mark on the tigress' body.

He said the post-mortem of tigress will be done as per the guidelines.

2 more tigers in Sariska by June

AGE CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

May 26: Two more tigers are being relocated to Sariska from the Ranthambore tiger reserve in the third week of June. Rajesh Gopal, member secretary of National Tiger Conservation Authority, pointed out that the next round of relocation, which will have a male tiger, should come as a boost to revive the tiger

population in this sanctuary.

The earlier relocation had the tiger mate with the tigresses but that did not result in any pregnancy.

A wildlife official pointed out that there was a possibility that the earlier male tiger brought to Sariska may have had a low sperm count. But the relocation process received a boost when a translocated tigress for the first time gave birth to three cubs in Panna reserve.