

Tiger panel for CBI probe in Bandhavgarh death

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NEW DELHI: India's tiger protection agency — National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) — has sought a CBI probe into the death of a tigress in Madhya Pradesh's Bandhavgarh tiger reserve, suspecting government vehicles carrying relatives of a state Cabinet minister may have hit it.

The tigress, Jhurjhura, was spotted injured by tourists on the morning of May 19 in the

Tala range of the reserve. She died a few minutes later. The death caused an uproar that spread beyond India's borders through social networking sites such as Facebook.

MP's Forest Minister Sartaj Singh said on Tuesday he was handing over the investigation related to the killing of the tigress to the CID.

NTCA member-secretary Rajesh Gopal, who visited Bandhavgarh this weekend, in a report to Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, said:

There's enough evidence to indicate that the two vehicles were carrying forest officer and others...

RAJESH GOPAL, NTCA

"There are enough arguments/evidences to indicate the two vehicles carrying (Akshay Kumar Singh), chief executive officer of zila panchayat, Umaria; (Lalit Kumar Pandey), forest range officer, Madhi and others were involved in the accident."

Others in the vehicles reportedly included Singh's relative; Dr K.K. Pandey, a veterinary assistant surgeon, said to be a person with considerable influence in the area, who was also present during Jhurjhura's post-mortem; and three children.

Locals allege Singh's relative is also the son of a minister in the state Cabinet.

In a clear violation of rules, two vehicles entered the park at 9.30 pm (beyond permitted timings) and visited the in-site enclosure at Baheraha for view-

ing the tiger cubs who were housed there, Gopal said. "The vehicles also went to the tigress spot in Tala and returned via the Bhadrashila barrier instead of the main gate, which is also cause of suspicion," the report said.

While the state government suspended three officials for negligence, it failed to nail down the vehicle responsible. "The tigress' post-mortem revealed that she was hit at least four times," said Shehla Masood, a wildlife activist from Bhopal.

(with inputs from Bhopal)