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# Hold your focus

Project Tiger needs special attention

ST-8  
CM-8  
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By rejecting the Planning Commission's recommendation to merge the three Centrally-sponsored schemes that relate to the protection of wildlife in India — Project Tiger, Project Elephant and the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats — the Union Ministry for Environment and Forests has ensured that the focus on these projects is not diluted. Individually, each one of these projects is a large and complex undertaking that needs special attention and has its unique requirement. Combining them into one mega scheme, as envisioned by the Planning Commission, which has even sug-

gested the inclusion of lions and rhinoceros in the mega-scheme, is a sure shot way to derail all the three projects and create something unmanageable. Particularly in the case of the tiger, a concentrated, highly-focussed approach — including the establishment of the National Tiger Conservation Authority which is a statutory entity incorporated in the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 — has been crucial in gaining successes, albeit limited, that has been registered in the animal's conservation. The number of tigers in India has risen from an estimated 1,300 in 2007 to 1,700 this year. Of course, the figure pales in comparison to the 5,000 tigers that roamed India's jungles even at the start of this decade; if anything, it points to the long road that lies ahead and underlines the importance of continuing with the project with increased dedication and commitment. Merger of Project Tiger with the other schemes would have had exactly the opposite effect, especially since there was also the possibility that funds for the project would have to be shared with the other schemes. This would naturally have an adverse effect on tiger conservation activities, with States such as Maharashtra that have the largest tiger reserves, being the worst hit.

Similarly, Project Elephant, which was launched in 1991-92, is just about taking off only now. Elephant reserves have been set up in recent years and the gentle giant was accorded the status of National Heritage Animal in 2010. If it is not given the special attention that it deserves at this stage, there is a strong possibility that Project Elephant will soon get derailed. As it is, several experts are not too happy with the ongoing elephant conservation efforts. As for the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats, that again is a whole different beast. The project allows for the Union Government to provide funds for the development of protected areas such as national parks, wildlife reserves and recovery programmes, but the funds are administered by various State Governments. To club it all under one umbrella scheme would have only led to acrimony between the States over the financial management of funds allocated for the purpose.