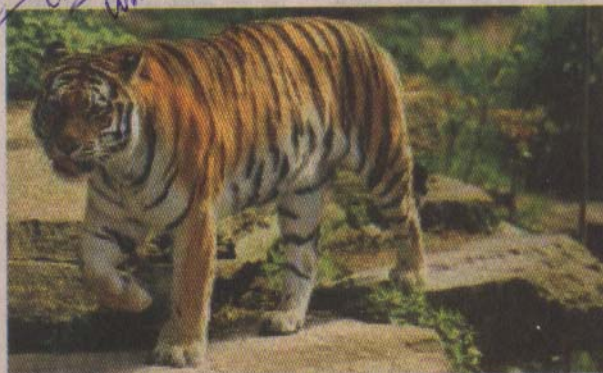


Green Min red light to merger

Plan panel had sought combining tiger, elephant & habitat projects

ST-6 / emb / NBWL



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The Planning Commission's proposal to merge three Centrally-sponsored schemes of Project Tiger, Project Elephant and the Integrated Development under Wildlife Habitat into one, has been junked by the Ministry of Environment & Forest (MoEF).

Members of National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the decision of Environment Minister Jayanthi Natarajan was conveyed in a recent Standing Committee meeting of the board.

Maintaining that it has come as a relief, NBWL members also pointed out that the nature of schemes of Project Tiger and Project Elephant are completely different from each

other with their own respective identities. The merger would have had an adverse impact on conservation of both, the National Animal as well as the National Heritage Animal, according to them.

Concerns were raised when the Planning Committee set up a sub-committee, chaired by its member BK Chaturvedi, to restructure the three Centrally-sponsored schemes.

According to sources, Chaturvedi had discussed the issue with MoEF, to work out a solution for ensuring flexibility and efficiency of schemes.

Indrani Chandrasekharan, adviser to the Planning Commission, wrote to MoEF secretary T Chatterjee to take action in the matter. Sources maintained that she had gone a step further and stated that the merger was also proposed

to include the conservation of lions and rhinos.

This rang alarm bells among the NBWL members, who wrote a strongly-worded letter to Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia, mentioning of the serious implications of the merger of the three schemes. The letter was signed by MK Ranjitsinh, Bittu Sahgal, Kishor Rithe, Prerna Bindra, TR Shankar Raman, Divyabhanusinh Chavda, Biswajit Mohanty, Asad Rahmani and Bibhab Kumar Talukdar.

The members pointed out that according to figures of 1,700 big cats announced early this year, India is home to more than half the tiger population of the world.

It also has the largest number of Asiatic elephants. The importance of Project tiger can be assessed from the fact that it was initiated at the instance of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi way back in 1973 and had existed much long before than MoEF itself that was established in 1985.