

Tiger census begins in Odisha

Maoist threat keeps officials away from Sunabeda sanctuary

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The census for the tigers across the State began on Saturday. The forest officials fanned out to the forests of the Satakoshia, Kuladhia, Ghumusar and Kotagada to count the big cats. However, due to the Maoists threat, they refrained from going deep inside the Sunabeda and parts of Similpal forest. The forest officials demand security cover for the operation.

Expressing concern over the security of forest officials,



Union Minister for Forest and Environment Jairam Ramesh wrote a letter to the Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik urging him to introduce an attractive incentive scheme for the forest officials engaged in Maoists hit-areas. He also asked the Chief

Minister to take up steps for fulfilling the vacant posts in the forest department particularly in the category of forester, rangers and guards. "Money from the 13th Finance Commission can be spent for the development of infrastructures in the forest

department," Ramesh stated in his letter.

According to sources, available from the Forest Department the census for tigers would be held on in four phases and 11,000 employees have been deployed for the counting. They have been assigned to count tigers on basis of pug-marks of both tigers and leopards. They have also been asked to take the photographs of the big cats to know the exact number of the tigers. The first phase census would come to an end on May 14. Later, all the information would be sent to Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.

In the second phase, the area of jungles in which foot-prints were marked would be gauged through satellite. In

the third phase, experts from Wildlife Institute would come to the State for the collection of samples and in the fourth phase the team would use camera to confirm the number of footprints already counted before.

Earlier the tigers were counted in the State in 2006. It was reported then that their might be 37 to 53 tigers in all jungles of the State including 21 in Similpal only. Chief Conservator of Forest PN Padhi said they would apprise the forest staffs officials problem to the Government. "However, it would not be possible to provide four security staffs to a forest official while the census operation is on," Chief Conservator of Forest Padhi said.