

OH, DEER! *ST/WS/emb*

One way to feed the tiger

ANIMALS have the right to life. The West Bengal forest department's latest policy in relation to the deer overlooks this fundamental fact. It is disingenuous, and the risk of a marked decline in their numbers is not just substantial, but definite. The logic is bizarre and cruelly so. There isn't enough space at Alipore Zoo. Therefore, close to 70 spotted deer are to be shifted not to a designated deer park, but to the wilds of the Sundarbans. They will have to adjust to the hostile environment and, no less crucially, face the risk of infection. The nemesis is chilling. From captivity in the zoo they will be freed in the forest, there to serve ~ horror of horrors ~ as food for the hungry tiger. To protect one species, another is being consciously sacrificed. The labour-justification, advanced by the forest department, is just not acceptable. It makes a travesty of the tenets that guide the preservation of fauna and the conservation of wild life. Just as the regal tiger needs to be sustained, so must the deer ~ a remarkably attractive creature. One can't be left at the mercy of the other. Yet that precisely seems to be the plan of the forest department. After a veterinary check-up, the deer will be released in the wild. Thus does the department hope to ensure a source of food for the tiger and eventually curb the straying into nearby villages. The two-pronged strategy is as daft as it is cruel ~ to relieve the pressure on space at the zoo and remain a mute witness to the killing of deer in the forests.

Why do tigers stray into human habitat, the Chief Minister had once asked. He now needs to reflect on the forest department's plan of action. It would be almost criminal to provide the endangered tiger with the meat of another endangered species. The wild life enthusiast is aghast.