

Efforts to control tiger trade have failed: CITES

Narayan Lakshman

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WASHINGTON DC: Governments across the world have "failed miserably and... are continuing to fail" to halt the growth of illegal poaching and trade in tiger body parts, says Willem Wijnstekers, Secretary-General, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Speaking at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, in Doha, Qatar, Mr. Wijnstekers said: "Although the tiger has been prized throughout history, and is a symbol of incredible importance in many cultures and religions, it is now literally on the verge of extinction."

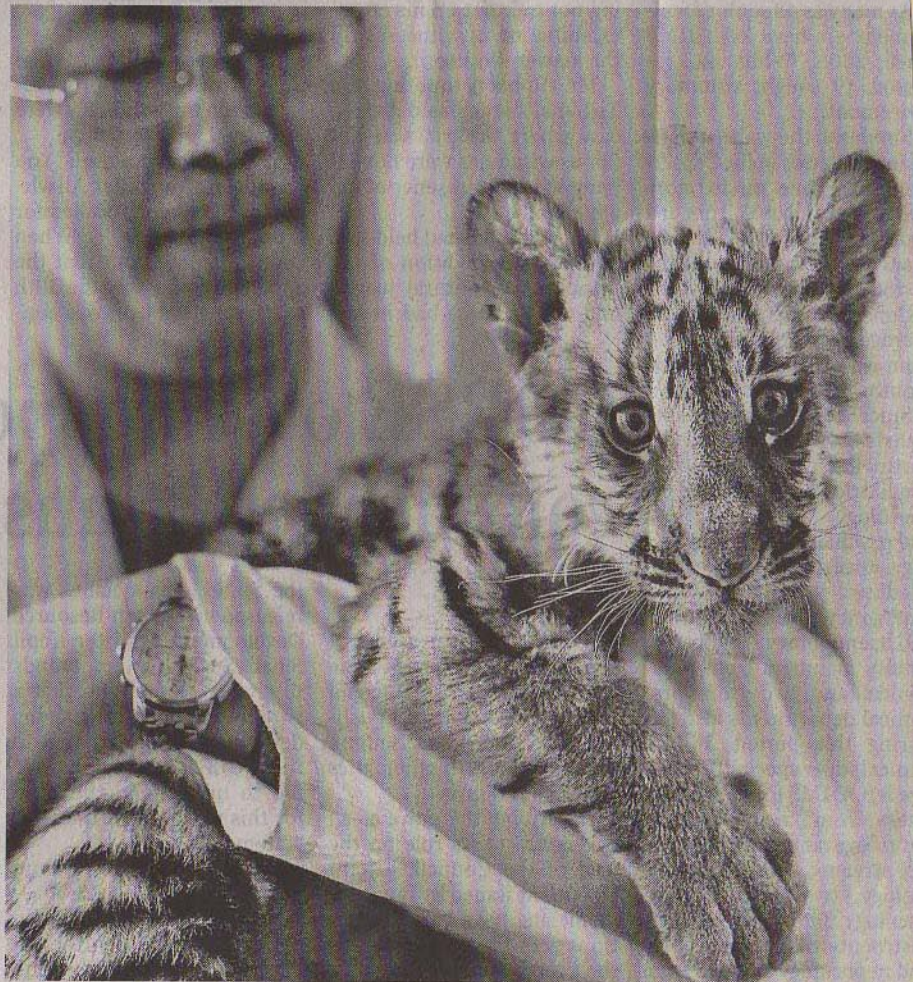
At the Doha meet, representatives of nearly 150 nations will vote on over 40 proposals on restricting trade in endangered species. The "miserable failure" comment reflected the poor record of the Global Tiger Initiative, a partnership of governments, international agencies and non-governmental organisations working collaboratively to save the tiger.

Pointing out that 2010 was the Chinese Year of the Tiger and the International Year of Biodiversity, Mr. Wijnstekers said the trend must be reversed this year. "If we don't, it will be to our everlasting

shame," he warned. According to CITES, tigers could be found throughout Asia in the early 1900s and numbered over 100,000. Current estimates suggest that fewer than 3,200 remain in the wild.

The World Bank, which leads the Global Tiger Initiative, has reportedly found that the trade is spurred by privately-run tiger farms in Asian countries such as China. Further, scientific studies in India have demonstrated that most wild tiger populations will not be able to withstand even small increases in poaching over time. While China banned trade in tiger bones and products in 1993, illicit sales continue. In a 2007 report titled *Taming the Tiger Trade*, the WWF said any easing of the Chinese ban would be a death sentence for the endangered cats. The report warned that Chinese business owners who stand to profit from tiger trade were pressuring the Chinese government to lift the ban.

CITES criticised ineffective policies to protect the tiger. "It is almost four decades since the world realised that tiger numbers were falling alarmingly," it said, alluding to the tens of millions of dollars that governments and the conservation community spent.



A worker at the Suzhou South China Conservation Base holds a seven-week-old tiger cub in this February 2, 2010 file photo. — PHOTO: REUTERS