

New year nightmares

In this Year of the Tiger how safe is the striped cat? With relentless poaching, their numbers have drastically come down.

REEJA RADHAKRISHNAN

As China celebrated their New Year on February 14, I raised a toast to my cousins there. This year is special because it is the Year of the Tiger according to the Chinese calendar. In Dragon land, my cousins number only about 50 in the wild — mix of Indo-Chinese, Siberian and Bengal tigers. Yet an-



From Sheroo's Jungle Book

wish him, he sounded sad: "Say a prayer for me Sheroo Chan. I'll be lucky if I live to see the next year." He is afraid that in this Tiger year, demand for tiger products may rise if people decide to celebrate the year a little too enthusiastically.

Traditional Chinese medicines have used our body parts to make all sorts of concoctions which they claim cures illness ranging from insomnia to malaria. Our teeth are used to treat fevers, our whiskers for toothaches, eye balls for epilepsy and malaria, brain for pimples, tail for skin diseases, claws for insomnia and bones for anything

from headaches to arthritis. To top this all, Tiger Bone wine is a popular health tonic in China.

Traditional remedies

You would believe that a tiger is the elixir of life for those folks. What I fail to understand is that there are other perfectly natural alternatives to us that can be used, according to traditional Chinese medical practitioners themselves. Those of you who use Tiger balms can rest easy. *That* does not have our body parts.

Now do you understand why there are only 50 wild tigers left in that country? To be fair, Chinese medicine stores are just not in China alone. You will find them in South Asian countries like Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong; even Chinese stores in

Tiger terror

Although wild tigers are a rarity in China, about 5000 tigers are bred in tiger farms throughout the country. The guys who raise these tigers want the trade ban lifted so that they can sell parts of the tigers they breed 'legally'. This they claim will stop poachers from looking for tigers in the wild. Who is buying their story?

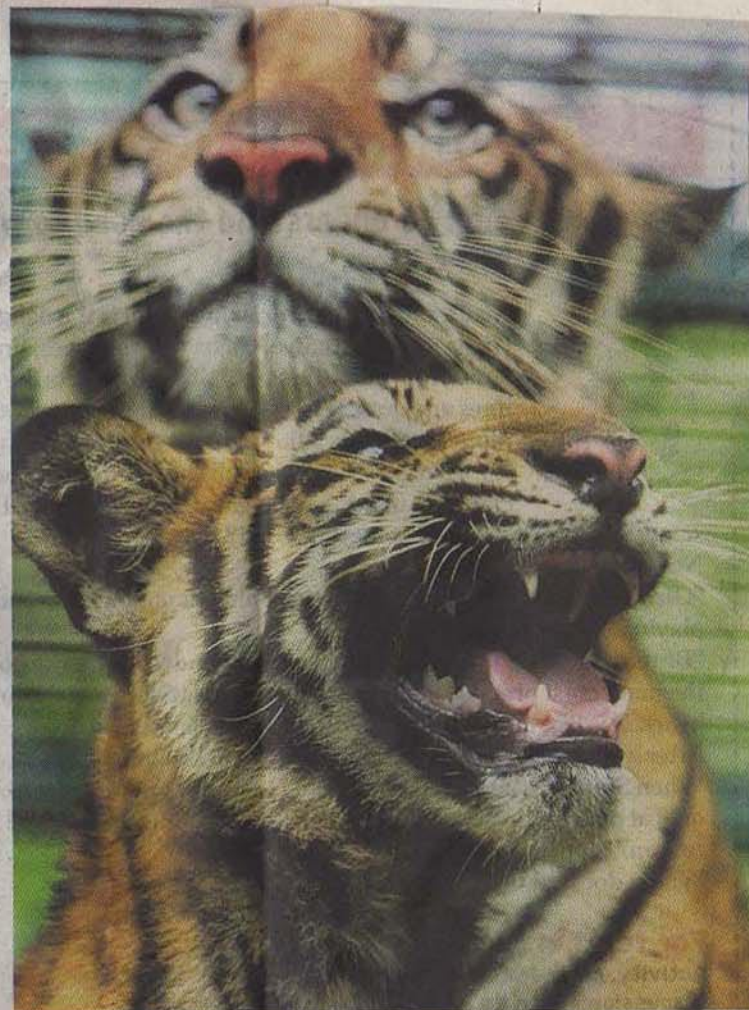
Poachers have wiped clean Sariska National Park, Rajasthan and Panna National Park, Madhya Pradesh both tiger reserves. There are no tigers left there. Currently three tigers from my home, Ranthambhore, have been relocated to Sariska. Panna got three too, one each from Bandavgarh, Kanha and Pench.

Europe and the U.S. stock traditional medicines. Tiger skin is also a prized possession of many who make robes from it or gift it as a wall piece. (Rewind to the story of my great, great, granddad Sher Shah Khan, I told you about?)

This is why poaching is big business in our country too. I should know; they got my mama. I've told you that too, remember? Tiger parts find their way out of our country through Nepal and Myanmar, from where they are taken to the South Asian countries.

Even though laws are there to protect us, it doesn't help. There are too few forest guards and too many poachers. Most of the time, villagers and tribals in the forest areas also help the bad guys because they can make money too.

People all over the world are trying hard to help. Over 140 nations



TROUBLED TIGERS : With numbers dwindling, will there be any around for the Year of the Tiger 12 years later? PHOTO : AP

have signed the CITES (Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna) treaty banning trade in tiger products. China too signed this treaty in 1993. But there is a lot of pressure on the Chinese government to lift this ban. Ban or not, the threat refuses to go away. Dan-

ger lurks in every jungle where tigers roam. Wonder how many of us will be left to celebrate the next Year of the Tiger?

Send in your mail to sherook@wildmail.com

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