

Forest dept's vehicle killed tigress: Report

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The ^{ST/WS/CMP} tigress in the Bandhavgarh reserve in Madhya Pradesh was killed by a forest official's vehicle. This has been confirmed in the report prepared by Member-Secretary of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) Dr Rajesh Gopal.

In his report, Gopal said the big cat was fatally hit by one of the two vehicles of the park management. Reserve range officer Lalit Kumar Pandey was seated in one of the vehicles. Gopal has advised the State for a CBI probe into the incident.

The Pioneer was the first paper to report that the tigress was killed by forest department's vehicles.

BANDHAVGARH TIGRESS DEATH

Gopal submitted the report to Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh on Tuesday. His visit to the tiger reserve came in the wake of inordinate delay in the submission of report by the State Government to the Centre. The report was prepared during his two-day visit to the reserve that concluded on Tuesday.

Gopal in his report states: "It's learnt that three Government vehicles had entered the park in the late afternoon on May 18. One returned on the same night. But the other park vehicles, including that of Range Officer Lalit Kumar Pandey and the other used by the CEO, Zila Panchayat, Umaria, stayed beyond the permitted park timings and visited the in-situ enclosure at Baheraha (Magdhi Range) for viewing the tiger cubs."

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This was in contravention of rules as this was a prohibited area.

"Further, the vehicles also went to the tigress spot at Tala and returned via Bhadrashila barrier instead of the main gate, which is also a cause of suspicion. There is a strong indication (emerging out of the detailed interaction with the local people and the field director) that the tigress was fatally hit by one of these vehicles," said the report.

Advising the State for an urgent CBI probe into the whole incident, Gopal stated that this would address the related issues as violation of rules, corruption and nexus, if any, between the lower functionaries of the park and tourist operators. Gopal has also called upon the State for immediately housing the orphaned tiger cubs in an in-situ enclosure within the park, with the technical advice of the Wildlife Institute of India and the NTCA, with Central assistance.

The report has also urged the State Government for strict regulation of tourism in tiger reserves besides expediting of the notification of buffer zones around the core areas of tiger reserves. The District Collectors

must be addressed to examine the corridor value of an area before granting permission for a change in its land use vis-à-vis the State level corridor connectivity identified in the recent

all-India tiger estimation.

He has also asked for strengthening of the hands of field directors by posting motivated frontline officers and staff.