

It is admired and revered, yet decimated. Why?

Prachi Aggarwal

part from championing the cause of the developing countries at the Copenhagen Summit, India and China share yet another ground of common concern, vital for their fragile ecology and natural environment. In the wake of China celebrating its current lunar year as the tiger year (Hunian), there has been a spate of increased criticism from conservationists and government about the increased threat of poaching that may seal the fate of the already endangered species. While China with its 50-odd population of the tiger is already in limelight, India's 1,000 or so tigers (the official statistics are held in grave doubts) are also on the verge of extinction thanks to the massive surge in demand, porous borders and rampant corruption on the two sides. While the market lies in China, Indian tigers are especially valued for their 'wilderness' which is preferred over the illegal farm-bred tiger.

The irony lies in the fact that, on the one hand, the tiger is still the national animal of India, the Chinese too revere the tiger, culturally as Wang or prince. The yang animal is especially worshipped for its prowess and is considered as the protector against "three disasters — fire, thieves and ghosts." Yet the money its skin and bones fetch in the international market is reason enough for poachers — in connivance with eager villagers and corrupt officials — to hack the poor animal to a ridiculously miserable death.

Historically, the tiger evolved in China and crossed

Indonesia and the river systems of South West Asia to spread to India and elsewhere. During the course, it evolved into eight subspecies which existed as late as 1940. However, anthropogenic factors, the loss of natural habitat, the encroachment of forest land due to increased population and the arrival of large development projects exposed the solitary tiger to human savages. The outcome was the complete extinction of three subspecies and massive endangerment of the rest of the five in the last three decades.

While China is considering the passing of the controversial law of legalising tiger

India and China should take colossal measures to bring back the tiger from the brink of extinction

trade, India, after pumping crores of rupees in 'Project Tiger' with depressed (the pun is intended) gains, is viewing the 'Payment for Ecosystem Services' as a new conservation instrument designed to provide direct incentives to the local communities living on the fringes of the sanctuaries. Undoubtedly, the issue has been tackled intelligently; however, red-tapism and bureaucratic nepotism over effective and speedy implementation takes away

the sheen from any hope for survival. A tiger's ecological importance lies in carbon sequestration and provision of rainfall to forest areas. Hence, the blame game should be stopped and colossal bilateral cooperative measures taken at both the micro and macro level to conserve and rehabilitate the tiger from the brink of extinction. Animal activists and concerned environmentalists have voiced enough opinion and reiterated sufficient facts for governments to shake off

stupor. Stringency and dedication are the need of the day to preserve the quintessential 'ROAR' from drowning in the slime of antiquity.

The third animal in the Chinese 12-year animal zodiac, the tiger represents the greatest earthy power as well as protection over human life. People born in the tiger years (1902, 1914, 1926, 1938, 1950, 1962, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010) are thought to be brave, strong, stubborn and sympathetic. Human civilisation has always been the existential and vital link between the wild and the tame. Today, the tiger needs protection for its own as well as our future's existence.

Act before it becomes a notional animal

Ramaswamy Krishnan

It all begins with sounds of birds and insects in the jungle, the perfect environment. Stripey, the two-month-old cub jumps out of the bushes. A mild husky voice of a female breaks the background. The scared and hungry cub roams around all alone waiting for his mother to come. Then goes the sound of a bullet fired from a gun. The advertisement ends here with the sentence: "There are just 1,411 tigers left". Yes, this is the latest ad by 'Save Our Tigers', a social campaign and an initiative by AirCel and WWF.

A website, www.saveourtigers.com has been launched with a concern over the decreasing population of tigers in India. It is said that there were

40,000 tigers by the last century. And, now the Wildlife Institute of India, in association with National Tiger Conservation Authority, India, has an average estimation that there are only 1,411 wild tigers left in India. A hard to digest fact. We, the humans, are to blame. It is a shame that we are about to lose our pride, the National Animal. The 17 tiger sanctuaries out of 37 in India are almost under threat. The Save Our Tigers team wants to spread the message and create the awareness. All that is needed is people should realise the current situation. Poaching and hunting have been the main reason behind the decrease in number. Deforestation is another reason. All major causes are only by human intervention. Just for the skin, fur, bone

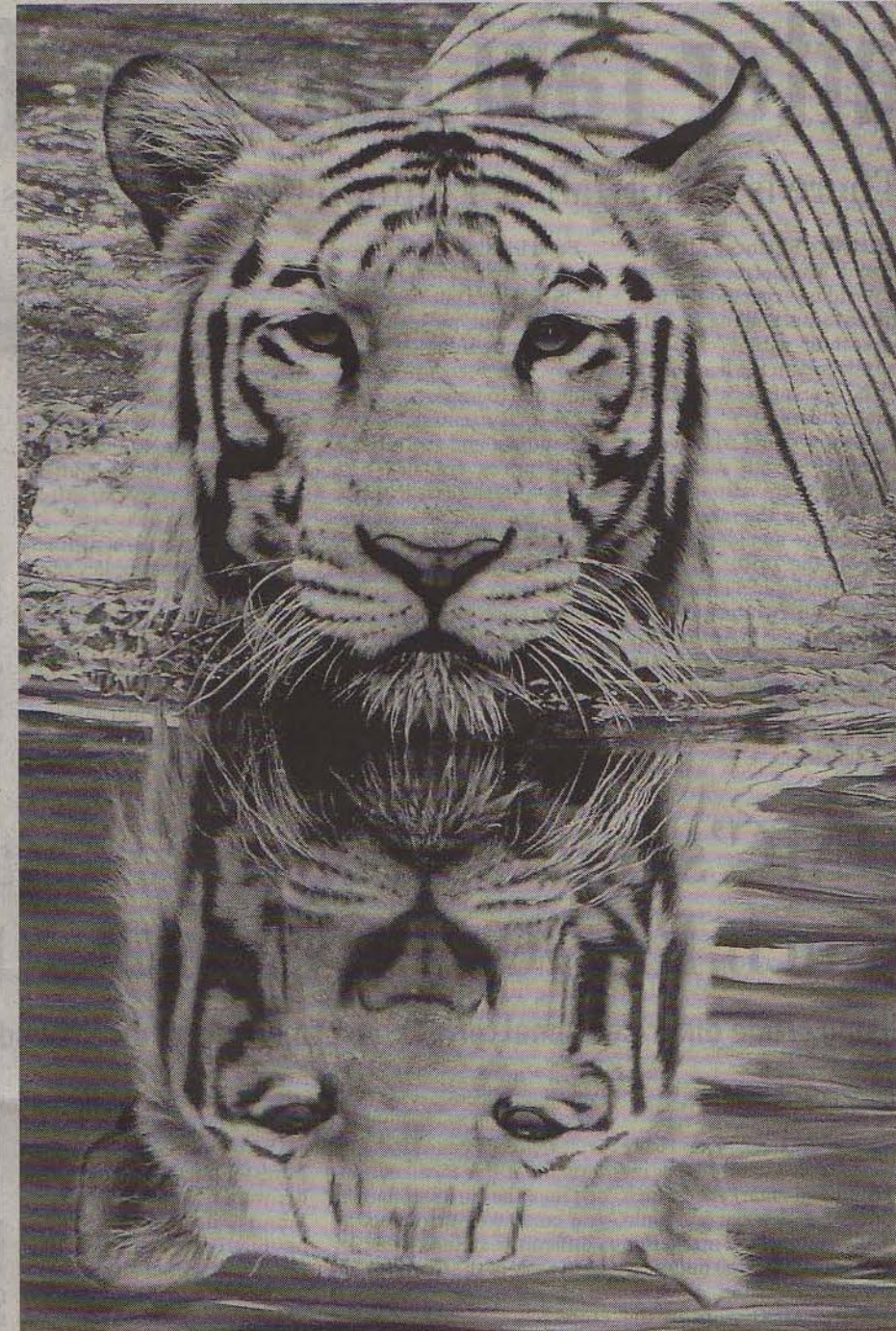
and other products we have lost the life of many tigers. The tiger can be saved only with the support of each and every citizen. Everyone can pledge their support and join the roar in the website. This initiative is all on web. Even in YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Delicious, Digg and StumbleUpon.

Famous personalities, football player Baichung Bhutia, cricket player Mahendra Singh Dhoni and actor Surya have shown their support. A blog has been created under the name Stripey the Cub. The website offers suggestions and ideas for the common citizen to show and share your concern over the issue. You can even donate to the NGOs working on tiger conservation through the website. Or, even volunteer to spend some valuable time

with the NGOs.

The website also gives information on tiger reserves in India and some latest news related to tigers. The blog is where many web surfers have shown interest. Many comments have been left. Shariq Parvez, a freelance journalist and social activist from Uttar Pradesh tells a lot about forest and the tigers in Pilibhit district, UP. A user named Karunanidhi Bhargava mentions that he sends 50 SMS a day for the cause. Another user Sivanesan Sadasivam says "I can't imagine a Nation without its National Animal, So I 'am gonna work to protect tigers." A very sensible statement, isn't it?

We may not have saved Stripey's mother. But, let's work on to save Stripey and its future.



ON THE BRINK: Yes, the present is tense and the future bleak. — PHOTO: PTI