

Tie up with locals to save tiger: film

A DOCUMENTARY on the country's rapidly-declining tiger population may provide some answers to the government and experts who are debating whether humans and tigers can co-exist.

According to the latest government estimate, the tiger population in the country is in the range of 1,300 to 1,500—a considerable drop from 3,642 tigers in 2001.

Krishnendu's Bose's *Tiger – The Death Chronicles* is based on visits to eight states which are home to the majority of the tigers. The film, which was screened on Friday, shows how natives have teamed up with forest department officials at the Jim Corbett National Park in Uttaranchal and BRT Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh and helped the tiger survive. The International Union for Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) recently rated the Corbett National Park as one of the best-managed tiger reserves in the country.

Both reserves have something in common—local residents depend on the forest for their sustenance. And in the process of providing for themselves, they conserve the forests helping in the protection of the tiger, Bose says. In BRT, tribals worship the tiger.

Central India has witnessed a dramatic fall of 65 per cent in the tiger population as forests are being used for mining and other commercial purposes. The encroachment on the tiger's habitat has led to a drastic fall in their numbers and forced them to come in conflict with humans.

Bose has also documented how the Supreme Court's ban on the use of forest produce by traditional users leads to commercial usage and the destruction of forest cover.

Then, there are reserves like Buxa in West Bengal, where tiger sightings are extremely rare. But government records have consistently recorded the number of tigers in the reserve as over 30. Raghu Chandawat, who radio-collared six tigers in Buxa, said three big cats went missing without a trace in a space of two years. However, the field director of the reserve denied this.

The documentary also demonstrates two perspectives on the on tiger-human conflict. The view held by experts such as Valmik Thapar and former director of Project Tiger P K Sen is that human interference should not be allowed and all 5,000 villages which fall within tiger reserves be relocated. On the other hand, environmentalists like Sunita Narain of the Centre for Science and Environment, suggest relocation only in extreme cases.