

# TIGER HELPS UNCOVER TIMBER ‘DEPOTS’ IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH’S NAMDAPHA NATIONAL PARK

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Logs and a truck seized from the core area of Namdapha National Park and Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh’s Changlang district. Photo: Special Arrangement

A tiger spotted after an eight-year gap could have helped uncover timber ‘depots’ deep inside India’s easternmost tiger reserve.

On March 14, officials in Arunachal Pradesh’s Changlang district found several timber depots in the core area of the 1,985 sq. km Namdapha National Park and Tiger Reserve.

Park officials bumped into the illegal logging activities while trying to find out why a tiger came out of the core area of the reserve after so many years.

The tiger was caught on cameras set up near the park’s Deban Forest Inspection Bungalow, after forest guards reported some pugmarks on January 31. It was the second tiger spotted in Namdapha after one in 2015.

“There are reasons to believe that the logging activities may have forced the tiger out of the dense, core area of Namdapha towards the bungalow, which is close to a 157-km road from Miao to Vijaynagar through a large stretch of the park,” a forest official said, declining to be quoted.

The office of Namdapha’s field director is at Miao, a sub-divisional town. Vijaynagar, close to the Myanmar border, is Changlang’s remotest circle headquarters.

The core area, largely inaccessible, is often not patrolled because the park is understaffed, the official said. Park officials got a whiff of the logging activities while checking out the tiger’s haunts in the core area.

According to a first information report (FIR) lodged by forest range officer T. Mali at the Miao police station, eight people were caught on March 14 during a raid led by Changlang’s Deputy Commissioner Sunny K. Singh. All eight, arrested later, are from Miao and adjoining villages.

The team seized an excavator, a pickup and two trucks, one loaded with logs. Another excavator and two trucks were founded abandoned. The unauthorised loggers and members of a timber-smuggling ring had carved a dirt track to ferry the logs.

"As per the preliminary survey, more than 2,000 CFT (cubic foot) of timber is lying at several depots en route", requiring extraction and scientific assessment, the FIR read.

"We will go to every possible length under the ambit of the law to preserve the rich flora and fauna of Namdapha National Park. All sections of relevant laws have been invoked to book the people involved (in timber smuggling) and the police are investigating for further action," Mr. Singh told *The Hindu*.

"The administration has directed forest officials to ensure strict monitoring of all the suspected areas along the boundary of Namdapha and take stringent action against the miscreants. Efforts will be made to protect our catchment areas from any disturbances such as timber operation," he said.

The timber operation was in the catchment area of the Mopen River and animals depend on this stream for drinking. The river, flowing through the tiger reserve, is also the main source of water for people in Miao town downstream.

Officials said timber smuggling could be connected to encroachment in the core areas of Namdapha along the Miao-Vijaynagar Road.

Logs seized from the core area of Namdapha National Park and Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang district. Photo: Special Arrangement

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