



A girl who was attacked by a leopard in Yawal.



The doctor inserting a microchip into the leopard's body. Microchips provide a life-long identification.



A microchip among brown rice-gives an idea of its size. The chips are uniquely numbered and can be read like a barcode is in a supermarket.

PICS BY VIDYA ATHREYA

MOVING THE LEOPARDS AWAY FROM THEIR HOME IS THE VERY ROOT OF THE PROBLEM IT SEEKS TO SOLVE

# Conflict in Junnar is due to TRANSLOCATION

## WRONG TIGER KILLED

In a recent response to an application filed under the Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005, the state forest department admitted that the wrong tiger was killed as a man-eater in the Tadoba forests in 2007. The department's reply stated that it had acted in haste under political pressure and points to letters it received from local politicians who had threatened to agitate and even kill the man-eater themselves. Villagers had complained in October 2007 that a tigress was killing people and cattle in and around the Tadoba-Andhari tiger reserve. The department began a hunt in November but failed to capture the animal. Local politicians then turned up the heat. During a subsequent operation, the officials sighted a tiger eating its kill. The team fired 39 bullets, of which 12 hit the mark.

## CONFLICT MOVED

A small boy was attacked in the Radhanagari wildlife sanctuary in Kolhapur district in February 2004 by a leopard. The leopard suffered a serious injury (broken skull) when it was assaulted by the father defending his child. The animal was trapped by the forest department and was identified by its chip as the female that had been captured in Narayangaon (Pune district) in March 2003. It was released in the Radhanagari forests in February 2004. The attack had occurred a day after she had been released and less than 5 km from her release site.

Similarly another feline that was caught in Sangamner and inserted with a chip was released in Borivli's Sanjay Gandhi National Park only to be recaptured in a Thane marriage hall a few weeks later.

## ANIMALS RETURN

It is now well-known that large carnivores like bears, leopards and tigers have a very strong homing tendency and they instinctively try to return to the area that they had been moved from.

There are instances of the cougars, a leopard-sized wild cat found on the American continent, having travelled over 400 km back to their site of capture to resume livestock depredation.

Closer home, a problem leopard caught 120 km away and released inside the Nagarhole national park in Karnataka in 1990 had immediately moved out of the park.

Another problem leopard captured in Gujarat and translocated 30 km away was fitted with a radio collar. It immediately returned to its earlier territory and resumed livestock depredation.

The Yawal leopard too had moved nearly 90 km in the direction of Junnar from the site of her release inside the Yawal wildlife sanctuary, before she was captured the second time.

## Pankaj Sekhsaria

To understand the serious incidents in Junnar involving big cats attacking humans, we need to go back to 2003. It was the time when the human-leopard conflict had peaked.

Leopards were being captured in cages in an effort to deal with the problem. Trapping leopards has, for long, been the main response to deal with a conflict situation. It is also one way of showing that action is indeed being taken. This becomes particularly relevant when there are human attacks and demand from the public, the politicians and the media to do something mounts. It happened in Junnar and continues to happen in a number of other places too.

The recent case of shooting down the wrong tiger in Tadoba Tiger Reserve is a classic case of wrong decisions being taken under intense media glare and political pressure.

As far as Junnar is concerned, a team of researchers that included Vidya Athreya and Pune-based veterinarian Anirudh Belsare had started working on getting a scientific understanding of the cause of the increased conflict.

A part of their effort was to mark and electronically tag these problem animals. This was done by inserting a small rice grain sized chip at the point where the animals' tails are attached to the body. The chips are uniquely numbered and can be read like a barcode is in the supermarket. Since captured leopards at that point were being released into other areas with potentially thick forests, it was hoped that the tagging exercise would help in tracking them once they were set free.

A number of these tagged leopards were moved 400 km to the Yawal wildlife sanctuary in Jalgaon district like they were to other parts of the state. They were subsequently released into these forests.

Yawal's forests have always had leopards but there were never any reports of attacks on humans. There was surprise and huge fear then, when villages in and around the forests, experienced a sudden and vicious spate of leopard attacks towards the end of 2003.

## DNA exclusive part IV

The two-month period stretching from October 31 to December 24 saw six attacks in a region that had absolutely no such history. The attacks stopped only when trap cages were put in place and two leopards were caught. What was striking about both these leopards, one male, the other female, was that these were Junnar leopards that had been released here just a few weeks ago. The chips inserted before their release had confirmed this fact. Movement of captured leopards from the area of conflict had in fact helped move the conflict to the new areas and significantly, to where it had never existed. This was not an isolated case.

It was becoming increasingly clear that the huge problem of human-leopard conflict that seemed to be spreading all over was essentially, a human created one. Athreya wrote almost immediately to the chief wildlife warden of the state that they were now certain that nearly all the cases of conflict and attack on humans that had occurred across the state from 2001 to 2004 were indeed due to the translocation that had preceded them.

Translocation which was being considered a simple answer and in use all over India, in fact, lay at the very root of the problem it sought to solve. It is only with the benefit of hindsight, we can now say we should have been more careful. Hopefully, the lessons have been learnt and the same mistakes will not be made again. There certainly are other contributory factors, some known and others that have still to be uncovered, but one key causative factor has certainly been understood. The earlier work that led to critical understanding of the problem in Junnar is an excellent example of that, as is the present effort at understanding the leopards of Akole and its behaviour.

We might not know all the causes that could push the Akole situation in a Junnar-like direction; but we can now say with confidence that we know of at least a critical few. The least we should ensure is that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past.

**TOMORROW:** Interview with Vidya Athreya

# Pioneers of citizens' services honoured

Tushar Sampat, Ravi Ghate get Nasscom awards

## DNA Correspondent

City-based health portal argya.com promoter Tushar Sampat and SMS-based local community newsletter promoter Ravi Ghate were honoured with the National Association of Software and Services Companies (Nasscom) Foundation's social innovation honour.

Union minister for trade and commerce Kamal Nath gave away the awards at the India Leadership Forum in New Delhi last week. Ghate said that smone, the local SMS community newsletter had benefited 350 unemployed youth from 25 districts

of Maharashtra. It provided them an income of Rs 5,000 to Rs10,000 per month.

Ghate said that the newsletter caters to at least 1,000 citizens residing in a specific 1 km area. He said that the information along with the consent of these citizens is collected by filling up forms.

Ghate said that his company had imparted training to 350 youth from various districts so that they can inform the company about local developments which are used for newsletters.

Sampat said his portal was visited by 1,000 citizens. Support groups for various diseases including epilepsy were getting encouraging responses. Such support groups for diseases helped the patients and their relatives cope.



Ravi Ghate - FILE PHOTO

# State norms to assess autonomous institutes

The parameters will ensure quality education in engineering institutes in the state, says council

## DNA Correspondent

Director of Technical Education SK Mahajan said the state government is likely to set key parameters to assess the standard of the educational institutes, which will obtain the autonomous status in the future.

Mahajan was speaking at a day-long workshop on 'Issues related to academic autonomy to engineering institutions' on Tuesday.

Bansilal Ramnath Agarwal Charitable Trust's Vishwakarma Institute of Technology (VIT) in association with the Directorate of Technical Education organised the workshop for chairpersons and principals of engineering institutions in the state.

Every institute claims to be one of the best institutes for gaining the autonomous status but there are no parameters or benchmarks of quality education, Mahajan said.

"For assessing the quality of these institutes, the government is likely to set certain parameters," he said.

Stressing the need for the autonomous status for each institutes, he



The director of technical education, SK Mahajan.

said that the existence of the autonomy depends on transparency and evaluation of the institutes. "The good results of the autonomous institutes will only be seen after 10 to 15 years. The institutes should have accountability," he said. He also appealed to the chairpersons and principals to apply for the autonomous status.

## quality control

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Speaking on the sidelines of the function, he said the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) has received around 125 proposals for opening engineering colleges across the state and the seat availability is likely to go up from 60,000 to 85,000.

He also said the Directorate of Tech-

nical Education had sent a letter to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to increase the number of examination centres from two to six in the state for the All India Engineering Entrance Exam (AIEEE) but the board is yet to reply on the matter.

Forbes Marshall director Naushad Forbes expressed the need of good faculties in engineering colleges to maintain the quality.

Enlisting the benefits of autonomy for the engineering colleges, VIT director HK Abhyankar said the autonomy led to unprecedented growth in self-financed engineering colleges from 1998 onward. "Due to the autonomous status, the engineering colleges can offer demand-based and value-added courses," he said.

# Revenue staff stir: Citizens bear the brunt

Work at Citizens' Facilitation Centre comes to a standstill

## DNA Correspondent

Citizens were put to much inconvenience on Tuesday when the applications for various certificates were not received at the Citizens' Facilitation Centre (CFC) in the collectorate.

The revenue employees were agitating for parity in pay scales. Revenue employees, as part of their agitation, have stopped doing non-revenue work including that of the CFC where citizens are given 29 various certificates.

The issuing of certificates had stopped on February 12 due to the agitation. But the applications of citizens were being accepted by the employees at the CFC.

About 5,000 applications filed in the last few days are pending. On Tuesday, the ap-

plications were not accepted at the CFC at all.

Important certificates like domicile certificate and caste certificate are issued at the centre. A large number of citizens gather at the CFC to get their certificates.

Officer in-charge Jyoti Kadam said, "Everyday more than 1,000 citizens file applications at centre." Meanwhile, district collector Chandrakant Dalvi said that he had requested some revenue officers to exclude the centre from their agitation in view of the inconvenience caused to citizens.

State government employees of the revenue department under the leadership of Mahasul Mahasangh Kruti Samitee are demanding that their pay scales be made equivalent to the employees of other departments.

Revenue employees said that after implementation of the recommendations of sixth pay commission, their salaries would be less by Rs6,000 than those in equivalent ranks from other departments.

# Shahu Maharaj's statue installed in parliament

Hundreds of people gathered at Dassera Chowk in Kolhapur to celebrate the event

## DNA Correspondent, KOLHAPUR

The people of Kolhapur celebrated the installation of the statue of legendary social reformer Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj on the parliament premises.

The statue was installed on Tuesday as per the resolution passed in 2003. Former Lok Sabha speaker Manohar Joshi had taken the efforts in this regard. The Maharashtra government con-

tributed Rs21 lakh towards the cost of the statue.

Hundreds of people, including students, gathered at Dassera Chowk in Kolhapur to celebrate the event.

Mayor Uday Salunkhe, Marathi daily Pudhari's editor Pratapsinh Jadhav, collector Laxmikant Deshmukh, Shivaji University vice-chancellor Manikrao Salunkhe, ZP CEO Jayshri Bhoj, inspector general of Kolhapur range Ashok Dhivare, superintendent of police Chandrakant Kumbhar, Kolhapur municipal commissioner Vijay Singhal, Nationalist Congress Party leader Dhananjay Mahadik and member of Kolhapur's royal family Madhurimaraje Chhatrapati also

attended the celebrations.

"The dream of having Shahu Maharaj's statue at the parliament has been realised, finally. We will always be thankful to the president, the parliament and the prime minister," Jadhav said.

The celebrations were marked by a procession of as many as 18,000 school-children carrying various tableaux on the life of Shahu Maharaj. The main attraction was showering of petals on Shahu Maharaj's statue at Dassera Chowk from a helicopter of industrialist Sanjay Ghodawat.

Shahu Maharaj's posters and hoardings, saffron flags and balloons were put up in the city and sweets, sugar and milk were distributed to the people.



**PROUD MOMENT:** People gathered at Dassera Chowk on Tuesday to celebrate the installation of Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj's statue in Parliament. (Inset) A helicopter showered petals on the statue in Kolhapur -ADITYA VELHAL