

# INDIA

## SCAN

### Two-horned rhino in India?

There have been reports from local villagers living along the Indo-Myanmar border in Arunachal Pradesh of occasional sightings of the Sumatran or two-horned rhino *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*. A local NGO, Nature's Beckon is investigating the reports. Similar reports have also been received from the neighbouring states of Manipur and Nagaland.

### Forests for votes

The forests in Karnataka's Wyanaad district are under threat from the state's politicians. The state government is reported to be attempting to allocate about 10,000 hectares of forestland to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This hilly district once boasted of abundant forests and a significant tiger population, but is fast becoming barren due to timber exploitation and other commercial activities.

### Elephant trouble

Orissa's elephant population is in danger of losing all its

breeding bulls due to heavy poaching. In late November, poachers near Joda in the Keonjhar district electrocuted three elephants. The poachers had made use of nearby electric poles to lay bare wires along a riverside track frequently travelled by elephants. In Orissa, the poaching of elephants is assuming alarming proportions, with the population falling from a high of 2044 in 1979 to 1600 in 1999.

### Scamming the people

Conservationists across the country are calling for the expedition of the investigation into the Bastar timber scam, one of India's worst environmental disasters. The report lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation names top politicians, officials and timber merchants. Between 1992 and 1996, an unholy nexus of government officials, politicians and timber merchants conspired to strip the Bastar district of a significant amount of its forest cover.



### Railway threatens tigers

Strong opposition is growing against a proposed railway link between the Sabarimala ashram in the Periyar Tiger Reserve and the national railway network. The rail project was cleared in 1998 by the BJP-led government at the Centre. The railway line will cause irreparable damage to the biodiversity of the Western Ghat mountains in Kerala through which it will pass. The region is home to several endangered plant species and over 2,000 plants that are used in traditional health systems. Forestland is already being encroached upon for infrastructure facilities for the Sabarimala temple.

### Mahadei forests in danger

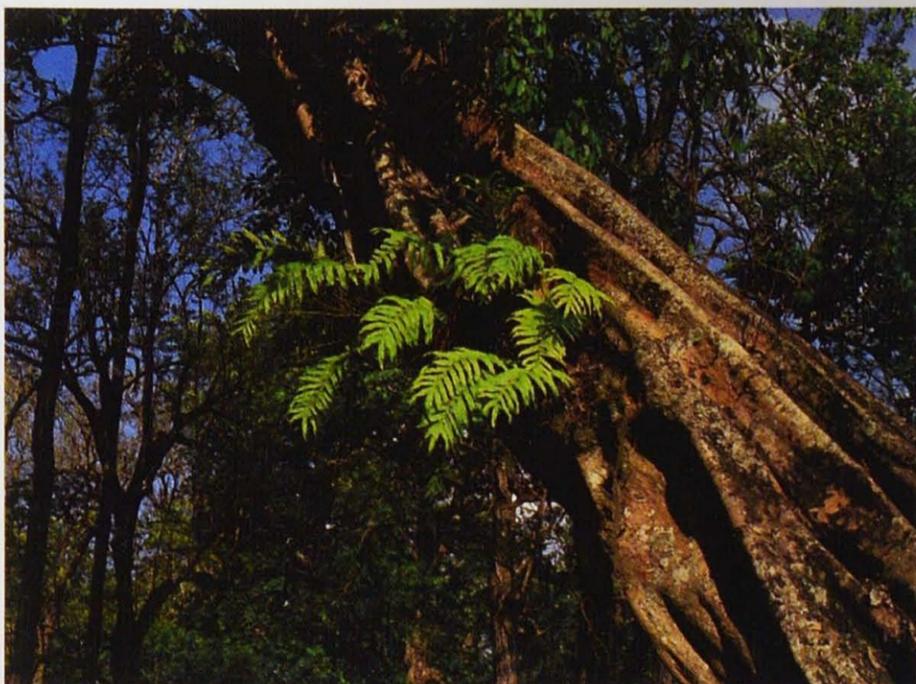
Efforts to protect the Mahadei forests in Karnataka's Belgaum district have taken on a renewed urgency in light of the Karnataka government's plans to construct the Mahadei Diversion Scheme and the Mahadei Hydroelectric Project. These projects, which envisage several dams and connecting tunnels, will lead to

the submergence of well over 4,000 acres of prime forestland. In addition, the construction process itself will disturb forests that are frequented by tiger, leopard and bear as well as other endangered creatures. These forests are contiguous with the Bhimgad forests, which is the only home in the world for the Wroughton's free-tailed bat. The Karnataka Forest Department has in fact proposed declaring this area a Biosphere Reserve. The very wisdom of such a large irrigation and hydroelectric project can be questioned considering that in the 25 years since the nearby Malaprabha dam was commissioned, it has been filled to capacity only thrice! Readers who would like to express their support for the protection of Karnataka's Mahadei forests can write to:

The Chief Minister of Karnataka, Secretariat, Bangalore.

To join the campaign to save the forests of Bhimgad and Mahadei contact:

The Nature Lover's Club, 111/1/1-B, Changulewadi, Belgaum - 590006.



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