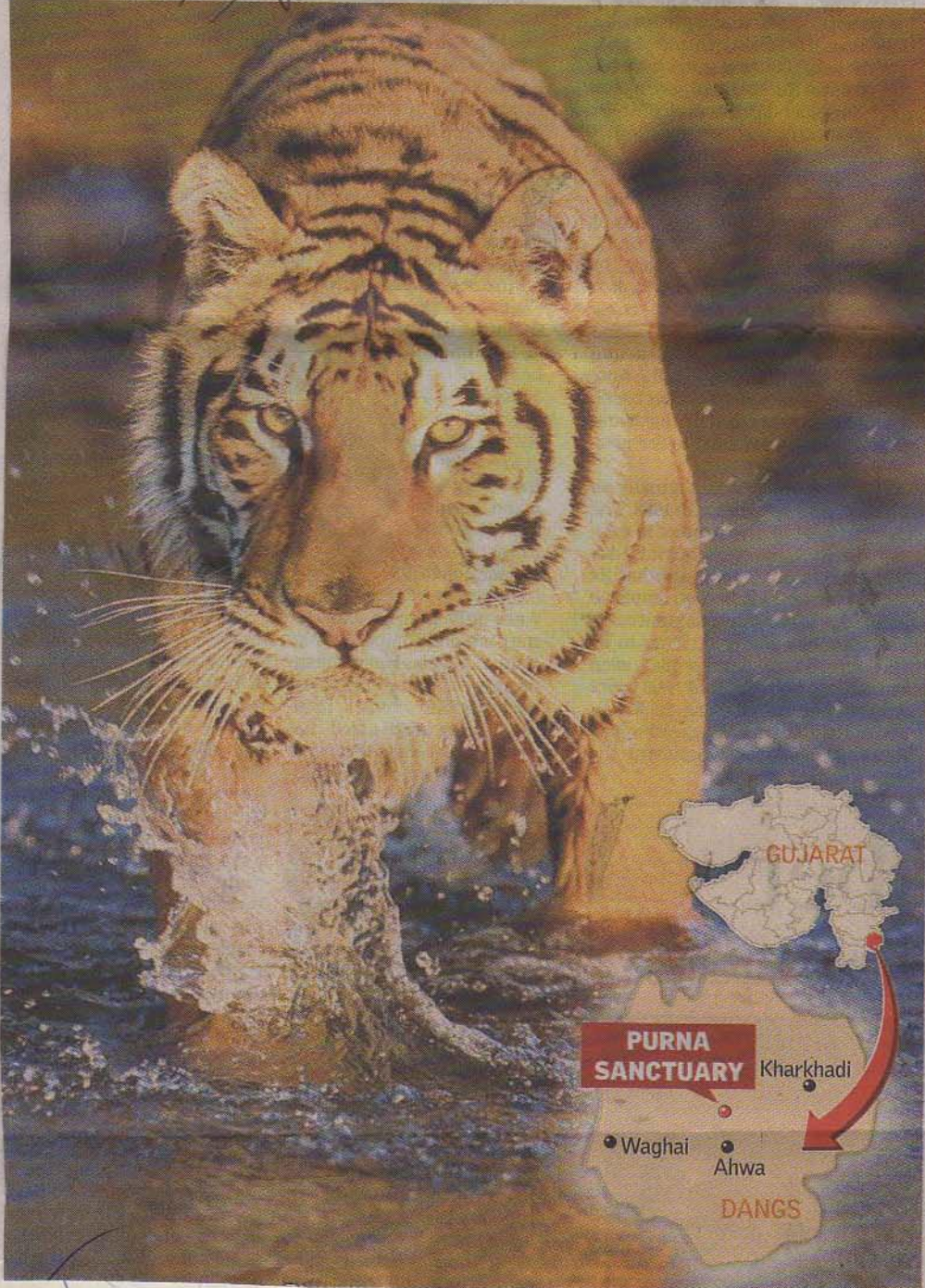


TIGERS IN DANGS

BUT WHERE IS THE PREY BASE?

ST-4 / WS



Himanshu Kaushik | TNN

Ahmedabad: Union minister of forest and environment Jairam Ramesh probably has no idea of what effort would go in to make the Purna Sanctuary in the Dangs, which was home to tigers 25 years back, wild again.

Experts feel the ground situation should have been considered before the minister offered Gujarat tigers for Dangs in exchange for lions for Kuno Palpur sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh.

Officials from the forest department said that the task would be like setting up a sanctuary all over again since there have been human settlements in these parts after the last tigers disappeared in 1993.

Forest officials say one would have to recreate the prey base, remove encroachments and even rehabilitate villages. The Purna wildlife sanctuary is scattered over a sprawling plot measuring approximately 160.8 square kilometres and positioned at the southern fringe of Gujarat.

Being regarded as a flank belonging to the Western Ghats, the sanctuary is jam-packed with damp deciduous trees and thick bamboo brakes which provide an apt ambience for an entire caboodle of fauna to flourish. The Purna Wildlife Sanctuary in Dangs gained the recognition of being considered a sanctuary in 1990.

Conservator of forest HS Singh says, "There are encroachments in Purna and it would be a hard decision to reintroduce tigers. There are a couple of villages which fall in the corridor of the wild cat. There is a railway track and roads which pass through the sanctuary." According to him, there is also a need to have a prey base of about 20,000 animals. For introducing at least two dozen tigers, one would need a block of about 500 to 600 sq km.

Former principal chief conservator of forest GA Patel said that, "The government had legalised cultivation in 2004. There were about 2.5 lakh adivasis in the Dangs all involved in illegal cultivation. The government regularised about 70,000 hectares in the area. The animal would need an area with no interference and no disturbance. If tigers were to be introduced there, over 70 odd villages would have to be rehabilitated".

"Re-introducing tigers in Dangs would be like setting up a sanctuary again which would be time consuming and would involve lot of money," said Patel.

Forest officials say one would have to recreate the prey base, remove encroachments and even rehabilitate villages in Purna wildlife sanctuary, spread over 160.8 square kilometres