KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

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How Nepal has managed to double its tiger population

By GOLAM MOSTAFA

AMONG the 13 tiger range countries in the world, Nepal is heading towards becoming the first country to meet the goal of doubling its tiger population – termed TX2 (tigers times two) – by 2022. In 2009, Nepal had roughly 121 wild tigers, but according to the 2018 census reports, now it has 235 of these magnificent wild cats, which indicates a 94% increase within 10 years.

On the contrary, despite Bengal tigers being an inextricable part of our identity, Bangladesh has shown little progress in reaching the TX2 goal by 2022. As reported by the 2018 tiger census, Bangladesh is now home to 114 Bengal tigers – an insignificant leap from the 2015 census where the tiger count stood at 106. Nepal has shown such tremendous progress over the years that now it has more Bengal tigers than the entire Bengal region, after which these big cats are named. Currently, the Bengal region, consisting of Bangladesh and the state of West Bengal of India, has 203 tigers in its forests, a number which is nowhere near to Nepal's booming tiger count.



In this 2018 file photo, a group of Nepali women take part in a community anti-poaching patrol to protect tigers in Bardia National Park, some 500km south-west of Kathmandu. – AFP

Despite being one of the poorest countries in the world, Nepal has put an extraordinary effort in increasing the tiger population in its forests since the 2010 Tiger Summit. It has taken multiple initiatives involving both political entities and local communities that ensured a sharp rise in the tiger count. To begin with, Nepal first identified the factors that are responsible for the decline in tiger population. It effectively reduced tiger poaching and apprehended the ringleaders involved with the global network of tiger poaching. In 2014, it was the only tiger-range country in the world with zero poaching. It even used unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to stop poaching of tigers and other near-extinct animals. It established more than 400 citizen-centric anti-poaching units across the country to prevent poaching by monitoring important wildlife corridors.

In addition, Nepal has pioneered in functional and robust habitat management. It has expanded the border of key tiger habitats, clearing the way for the tigers to roam around freely with a tolerable tiger density. Nepal has also strengthened its forest authority's capacity to help them play a vital role in meeting the TX2 goal by allocating more budget, manpower, and modern equipment. In order to decrease human-tiger conflict, the country worked with the local communities to voluntarily relocate villagers from the protected forest areas, and put commendable effort in decreasing dependency on forest products. The country has also empowered the local people to take steps on their own to protect the nearby forests, and has left 28% of its forests to the local communities to manage, which resulted in a peaceful co-existence between the tigers and the humans.

Furthermore, realising the importance of a stabilised prey base, Nepal took measures to ensure suitable habitat for key prey species. Nepal built dozens of ponds in strategically important locations, set up solar technology-based freshwater courses, and established new reserved forests to maintain linkage between major tiger and prey habitats.

Over the past 20 years, Bangladesh has lost 38 tigers to poaching activities, tiger-human conflicts, and other issues. The Nepal model can be handy in dealing with these issues. By following the Nepal model, Bangladesh should be able to create effective local anti-poaching units and initiate campaigns to help the rural population avoid tiger-human conflicts. It can also help Bangladesh in ensuring an effective habitat management for both the tigers and the prey species. – The Daily Star/Asia News Network