News Briefs

Compiled by the Editor

1. Unwise to chase away marauding elephants on your own, villagers told (Malaysia)

Bernama.com
January 4, 2010

JELI - It is unwise for villagers to, on their own, chase away marauding elephants which destroy their crops as this can endanger their own lives. The advice came from Kelantan Department of Wildlife and National Parks director Pazil Abdul Patah after a resident of Kampung Pendok and five friends almost got killed by a wild elephant which they were trying to chase away for destroying their crops.

Pazil said he understood the anger and frustration of villagers when their crops were destroyed by wild elephants, but they should not act on their own based on emotions and instead think of safety and get help from the department. Pazil said the residents and others in nearby villages, who were constantly under threat from wild elephants, should be more careful and know the risk involved. He said, the department always deployed its officers to monitor the area and to chase away wild elephants which threatened villagers' crops.

2. Elephant rampage makes people wary (Indonesia)

The Jakarta Post
January 27, 2010

LABUHAN RATU - The residents at 22 villages near the Way Kambas National Park have become wary about rampaging elephants, which have damaged their ready-to-harvest plantations. They say the elephants cannot be shooed away by torches, bamboo drum rattles or gun shots. They complained they had their paddy, corn, cassava and coffee plantations disrupted by the rampaging elephants. A herd of up to 20 elephants can damage between 4 and 6 hectares of land. Sayuti, a villager, said the elephant-human conflict had been ongoing for 30 years with no solution in the horizon.

3. Rampaging elephant and calf safely caught (Malaysia)

The Star
February 9, 2010

IPOH - A female elephant that had been on a rampage near Grik was finally captured by the Perak Wildlife and National Parks Department (Perhilitan). Department Director Shabrina Shariff said the elephant was part of a herd of 15 to 20 elephants that had destroyed crops of villagers around Kampung Chepor in Lenggong, near Gerik.

"Since 2008, we received over 40 complaints from villagers regarding the animal which destroyed oil palm and rubber crops," she said "The elephants", she added, "were believed to be from the Piah Forest Reserve near the village". Shabrina said her officers managed to tranquilise the female elephant at 12.30pm and had it chained. "The two elephants will be relocated to the Piah Forest Reserve soon with help from Kuala Gandah Elephant Sanctuary officials," she added.

4. Four Bali parks hope to draw tourists with imported elephants (Indonesia)

Jakarta Globe
February 9, 2010

DENPASAR - After last year's failed attempt to ship in Komodo dragons, Bali now is looking at getting elephants from Sumatra to attract more tourists. Four conservation institutions in Bali on Tuesday requested 59 elephants from Way Kambas National Park in Lampung: 10 for the Elephant Safari Park in Taro, Gianyar district; 14 for Bali Zoo Park, also in Gianyar; 15 for Kasian

in Badung; and 20 for Bakas Zoo in Klungkung district.

The request was made at a meeting in Sanur, Bali, on elephants and other wild animals in conservation institutions. "We hope that this could be a new breakthrough for Bali tourism," said Anak Agung Gede Putra, an official with Bali Zoo Park, explaining that the elephants would be used as ride attractions.

Nyoman Suweta, a representative from Bakas Zoo, said the elephants would not disrupt the environment as the province had about 402,000 hectares of idle land, some of which could be used to boost tourism.

Conservation institutions in Bali already have 93 elephants, including 33 at Taman Safari Indonesia, while the Elephant Safari Park in Taro has 32, Kasiana has 18 and Bakas Zoo has 10. There are about 200 wild elephants in Way Kambas National Park, and 61 more in the park's elephant training center.

The Sumatran elephant is an endangered species. A 2000 survey estimated at most 2,700 living in the wild. The biggest threat to the elephant is habitat loss due to forest conversion.

5. Novel way to check man-animal conflict (India)

The Hindu
February 8, 2010

MYSORE - Even as the Forest Department is planning to erect elephant-proof barricades to a length of 547 km in different wildlife sanctuaries in Karnataka to reduce man-animal conflict, forest officials of Chamarajanagar have succeeded in containing the conflict to some extent by adopting a novel strategy.

As a result of efforts of the forest officials and support extended by the local community, no elephant was electrocuted in Chamarajanagar district in the last 18 months, according to Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF), Chamarajanagar, Biswajit Mishra. On an average, five to six elephants were dying of electrocution every year. This was because of the frustration of farmers, who were losing their standing crop and not getting proper compensation in time. To address the issue, the department adopted a "three-pronged strategy." Besides saving the lives of pachyderms, the eco-friendly approach has helped in protecting standing crops too.

Mr. Mishra told 'The Hindu' that the staff rushed to the help of villagers and extended all support in scaring away the elephants that strayed into agricultural fields. Officials visited the spot immediately and submitted a report on the damage to life and crops for immediate release of compensation. "We have cleared compensation due to the farmers for the past eight years, and so far compensation to the tune of Rs. 54 lakh has been paid to them. This has helped in winning the hearts of farmers to some extent," he said.

Mr. Mishra said that recently it was decided to hand over the responsibility of erecting and maintaining solar fences to EDCs by extending them technical training and paying them Rs. 1500 a month as maintenance allowance.

6. Ministry has mammoth plans for jumbos - Project Elephant (India)

The Pioneer
February 13, 2010

Home to 60 per cent of the global wild Asian elephants, India has now woken up to the cause of its pachyderms with a "fresh impetus" and decided to set up an institutional framework" on par with its flagship Project Tiger scheme.

In view of the cultural and ecological significance of the species, accorded the highest protection by being listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Government has decided to develop an "institutional framework" at the Central and State level, which is not only on par with its flagship scheme Project Tiger but enjoys the same stature.

On Friday, the Ministry set up a high-level Task Force to draft the roadmap for strengthening

elephant conservation in India. The Task Force, which is required to submit its report in May this year, has also been asked to recommend measures and strategies for the suitable use of captive elephants, an issue which has been neglected over the years leading to gross violation of laid down existing norms in this regard.

As things stand, India's wild elephant population is pegged at 27,694 as per the last census carried out in 2007. This is an increase of over 12,000 in the last three decades. However, India doesn't have an inkling of the present strength of captive elephants. For, the last survey was done way back in 2000, and which put their numbers at 3,567.

7. Fruitful study on wild elephants' movement (Malaysia)

The Star
February 20, 2010

KINABATANGAN - Age and gender have been found to dictate the movement of Bornean elephants roaming in the wild of the Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary (LKWS). These were among the initial findings of a study being conducted on three elephants that were fitted with satellite collars two years ago. The move is an effort by experts to help minimise elephant and human conflicts.

"The data we have obtained so far shows that Bornean elephant movements in the wild varied between male and females," according to researcher Nurzhafarina Othman, who is carrying out studies on the social behaviour of the elephants.

The elephants were fitted with the satellite collars in a joint project carried out by Sabah Wildlife Department, Danau Girang Field Centre (DGFC) and French non-governmental organisation, HUTAN. "We placed one collar on a male bull, and another on a female which was the matriarch. The final collar was put on a younger female, that had been collared previously by WWF-Malaysia, " said Nurzhafarina.

DGFC director Dr. Benoit Goossens said the data obtained was vital in helping to understand how elephant movement varied within its population based on gender and age. "It is crucial to know if there is any traditional or common route used by the elephants at LKWS as it will help wildlife managers identify important areas within the sanctuary to establish wildlife corridors for the elephants," he added.

8. Bangladesh's elephant trails grow faint

bdnews24.com
February 21, 2010

DHAKA - Bangladesh's elephant trails, the centuries-old natural pathways made and used by the Asian pachyderms are being gradually whittled away as humans encroach across them. As these magnificent animals see their foraging grounds shrinking, elephant attacks on humans become more frequent. This further threatens the endangered mammal's dwindling numbers.

At present the number of elephants is between 250 to 350 in 11 forests of the country, forest conservator (wildlife and nature conservation circle) Tapan Kumar Dey says. Also, another 83 to 100 elephants move across the borders from Myanmar's Arakan and India's Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura states. There are another 94 to 100 captive elephants in zoos and circuses.

Dey says elephants have suffered serious loss of habitation because of human encroachment inside the forest over the last few decades. Loss of their long-used trails also disorients the animals. "The elephant trails are disappearing because of human habitation and road construction. There is a shortage of their food and water," Dey told.

In Chittagong, Khagrachhari, Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, Mymensingh and Sylhet the ages-old elephant corridors have shrunk. The forests of Mymensingh, Sylhet, Chittagong and the hill tracts CHT were elephant sanctuaries once upon a time. Now these endangered mammals are found only in the forests of Chittagong and the hill districts.
"The sanctuary of our elephants is shrinking day

by day. Attack of wild elephants has increased because they are losing their habitats and natural trails," Ainun Nishat, adviser of IUCN,said. "The tracks that elephants used for foraging, passing through them five times a year on average, are now being taken up by humans. Now, the elephants are seen on these trails just once a year," said Nishat.

A policy will be formed to protect elephants and also to compensate those who have suffered losses, Majumdar said. Conserving forests, planting trees for elephant food, following the wildlife act and increasing public awareness can help counter elephant attacks, suggested Anwarul Islam, chairman of Bangladesh Wildlife Trust.

9. Proposed Nilgiris elephant corridor runs into resistance (India)

The Times of India
February 26, 2010

VAZHAITHOTTAM - Tension is simmering over a proposed elephant corridor in the Ooty foothills. While conservationists say this is essential to restore the man-nature balance, farmers and property owners are questioning the state government's decision to acquire 7000 acres of fertile land for it. The whole area from the Bandipur reserve forest in Karnataka, adjoining the Mudumalai wildlife sanctuary of Tamil Nadu and the foothills of Ooty, was once untouched "tusker territory", say wildlife activists.

Humans have now intruded into the wilderness and encroached upon the Unesco-recognised Nilgiri biosphere reserve comprising more than 5000 km^2 in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka, they say. Of the around 2000 elephants in the southern peninsula, half are in the three contiguous, ecologically sensitive sanctuaries.

While officials deny that land acquisition for the elephant corridor has already been initiated, residents say under the Tamil Nadu Preservation of Private Forest Act, 1947, proceedings have begun in Masinagudi, Mavanallah, Bokkapuram, Vazhaithottam, Anaikatty and Sigur. A farmer said their main occupation had been agriculture for more than 500 years and now "more than 2000 families would be displaced".

Another farmer in the area said: "The more than 10,000 Sri Lankan refugees have not been touched by the Tamil Nadu government's move to provide the elephant corridor."

10. Jumbos run out of space (Malaysia)

Daily Express
February 28, 2010

KOTA KINABALU - The Sabah Wildlife Department has detected more cases of human-elephant conflicts due to lack of habitat for the State's unique wildlife. Disclosing this in a statement, its Director Laurentius Ambu said this is despite some 49% of permanent forest cover being retained and it being the second biggest State in the country. He said Sabah is blessed with wonderful wildlife from orang-utans, rhinos, elephants, sun bears, clouded leopards that are unique to this State but "we have a forest that is broken up by agriculture without corridors linking them and this leads to conflict".

He explained that such behaviour was not common among Sabah's gentle elephants but seemed to be increasing over the last three to five years due to development of the natural habitat without providing for forest corridors. He said people also need to understand that unless this is settled and private companies make real efforts to reforest corridors, things will reach the stage of having to put down this gentle creatures.

The Bornean elephant is a distinct sub-species from the Asian Elephant and is only found in Sabah, although some individuals roam in Northern Kalimantan (Indonesia), and thus makes Sabah the sole custodian of this unique sub-species of elephant.

In Sabah they are protected under the Wildlife Conservation Enactment of 1997, under which unlawful killing of an elephant carries a fine of RM 50,000 or a jail term of five years or both under Section 25 (3) (b) if proven guilty. It also allows the department to put down individuals as

it sees fit to control the population. "Today, there are fewer than 1500 individuals left in Sabah." said Laurentius.

11. Villagers in Assam take care of an injured elephant (India)

Sify News
March 12, 2010

Villagers of Shattergaon are taking care of a female elephant, which got hurt by a train near Deepor Beel (a freshwater lake) in Guwahati. A goods train had hit the elephant on February 28, when it was trying to cross a railway track. The injured elephant, pregnant at that time, then gave birth to a male calf in a nearby forest. But, she abandoned her calf and vanished in the Garbahanga Reserve forest in Kamrup district.

Forest officials then found the newborn calf and took him to the Assam State Zoo. The mother elephant then reached Shattergaon village, near the Garbhanga Reserve forest and is now being taken care by the villagers. To save the animal, the villagers are fetching water and banana trees to feed the ailing animal.

"The officials come to see the elephant and then go back. They are not bothered with what the elephant needs. This is such a sad situation. The elephant needs a quintal of food in a day but they bring only a kilogram of food for her. Moreover, the animal needs tons of water. How can a litre or two of water help the poor elephant?" asked Narzary.

12. Army accused of killing elephants, selling ivory (Myanmar)

The Irrawaddy
March 8, 2010

Burmese army units from Butheetaung and Maungdaw townships in Arakan State are reportedly capturing and killing wild elephants and illegally exporting ivory to China, according to an Arakan environmental and human rights organization. The rounding up of wild elephants is occurring in conjunction with a search for a white elephant, say environmentalists.

Khaing Htun Lin of the Bangladesh-based Arakan Environment Preservation and Human Rights Watch told The Irrawaddy that Capt Aung Thura Heing of Light Infantry Battalion (354), Captain Hein Khant of Infantry Battalion (263) and Pe Than of the Butheetaung 5 Mile Elephant Camp have worked on the project, which began in January.

"As far as we know, more than 10 wild elephants have been captured since the beginning of this year," said Khaing Htun Lin. "We estimate that at least 500 elephants has been caught this decade. The army cuts ivory from some elephants and, together with businessmen, it is exported to China."

In 2004, the regime captured a white elephant from Mayu mountain in Yathetaung Township and then Prime Minister Gen. Khin Nyunt, built a garden on Min Dhamma hill in Insein Township in Rangoon where it was kept in a compound. According to tradition, ancient Burmese kings believed they would become more powerful if they possessed a white elephant.

Environmentalists are concerned that elephants in Arakan State are in danger of extinction from hunting and also an exodus of elephants from Arakan to Bangladesh.

13. Poachers kill another elephant for ivory (Laos)

Vientiane Times
March 4, 2010

A 41 year old male domesticated elephant has been slaughtered for its body parts in Vientiane, with the hunt continuing for those responsible. The attack took place a short 40 minute drive from central Vientiane in Nanga village, Naxaithong district, at the end of last month and appeared to be the work of at least two poachers.

The elephant, known as Phu Thongkhoun, belonged to Mr. Somyod Phimasan, who was left distraught by the death, saying this was the third

elephant he has lost to illegal poachers, totalling a loss of about US$40,000. The two prior incidents occurred in Xieng Khuang province in 2007 and 2009, where he lived previously.

Elephant conservationists have expressed their concern about the illegal poaching, which they say is leading to a rapidly declining population. This latest attack occurred at around 2am on February 26, when villagers who live near Mr. Somyod's garden reportedly heard three gunshots, which they initially dismissed as hunters given the area's proximity to woodland.

Mr. Somyod contacted conservation group ElefantAsia to inform them of the illegal poaching and to ask for assistance in ascertaining the cause of death. The group's veterinarian, Dr Bertrand Bouchard, undertook an informal autopsy on the remaining body parts and concluded that Phu Thongkhoun died from at least three high-calibre bullets to the head and face. The elephant's ivory, tail, face and tip of the trunk were all removed, presumably for sale on the black market.

Less than 500 domesticated elephants remain in Laos, with poaching a recurrent problem. Local laws are clear regarding the killing of elephants. In 1989 the government declared a ban on the hunting and killing of protected, endangered species, and became signatories to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora in 2004.

14. Timber industry threatens elephants habitat (Indonesia)

The Jakarta Post
April 7, 2010

JAMBI - The habitat of two large groups of elephants were reported to be in danger of extinction following a plan by PT Lestari Asri Jaya, a subsidiary of PT Barito Pacifi TBK, to open an enclave of forest. The company has recently been granted an exclusive right to manage 61,500 hectares of forest area in Tebo regency, as stipulated by a Forestry Ministry letter. Arnold Sitompul, the head of the Indonesian Elephant Conservation, said the area was home to two large groups of elephants, called Semambu and Riau-Jambi. The Sumatran Forest is reported to hold only up to 2800 elephants currently.

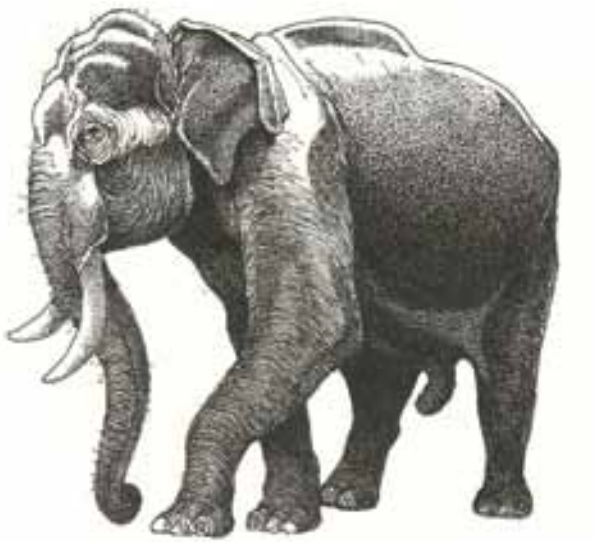
15. Dying elephant calf rescued in Borneo (Malaysia)

news.com.au
May 24, 2010

Malaysian wildlife authorities said they rescued an endangered Borneo pygmy elephant calf that was separated from its mother and found dying in a plantation. The six-month-old elephant was weak and dehydrated when found last week after plantation workers alerted the wildlife department in eastern Sabah state, on Borneo island, its chief veterinarian Sen Nathan said.

He said the calf was lost in the plantation for at least three days before it was rescued. "A calf relies entirely on the mother and if it is not fed for that long, this would have normally killed the elephant," he said. "Its condition was bad, and it could have died from dehydration," Mr. Nathan said, adding that an elephant was only capable of looking after itself after it turned three. Its condition has stabilized and it is recovering,"

Pygmy elephants are unique to Borneo and form a subspecies of the Asian elephant. Males stand only about 2.5 meters tall, compared to about 3 meters for mainland Asian elephants. Authorities said the elephant species is considered endangered, with about 1500 to 2000 left on Borneo island.



Drawing by Arnab Roy