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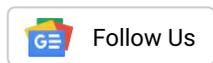
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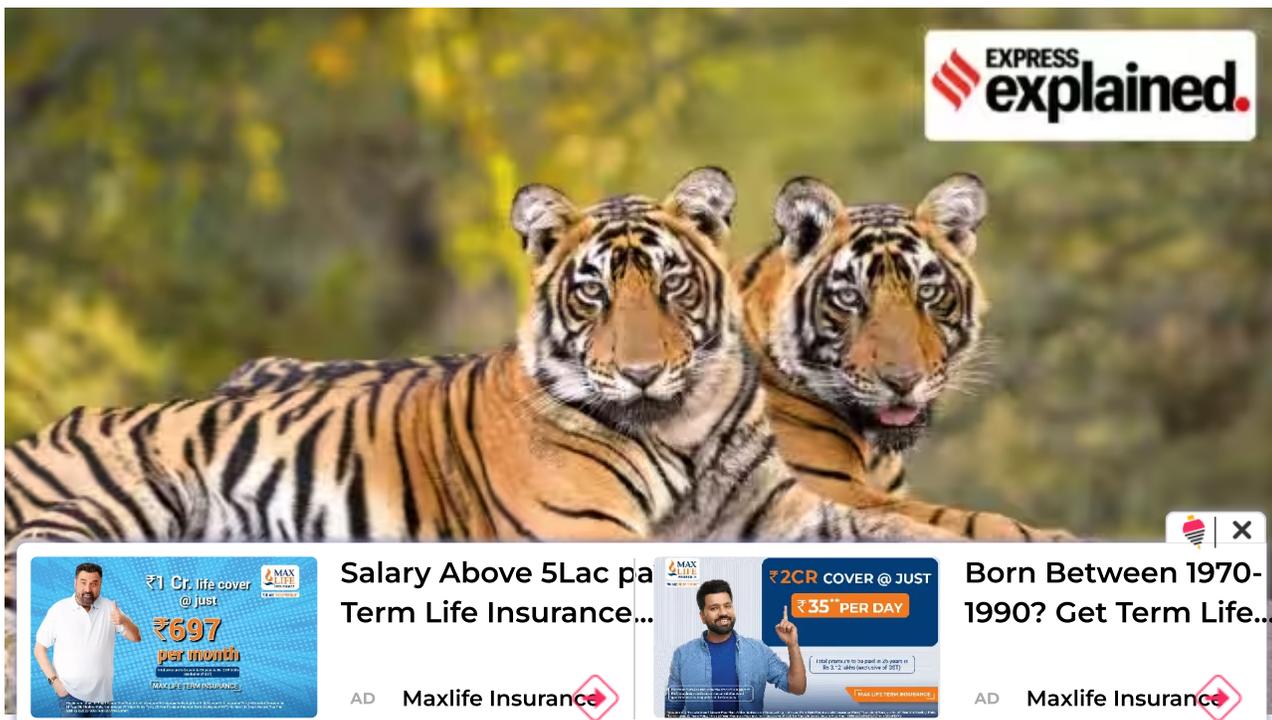
International Tiger Day: How Project Tiger saved the big cat in India

Project Tiger was launched by the Indira Gandhi government on April 1, 1973, in a bid to promote conservation of the tiger. It came at a time when the population of tigers in India was rapidly dwindling, reaching an all time low due to unfettered hunting and habitat loss.

By: **Explained Desk**

New Delhi | Updated: July 29, 2023 16:05 IST





Sawai Madhopur: 18-month old tigers rest not far from their mother at the Ranthambore National Park, in Sawai Madhopur, Thursday, Nov. 5, 2020. (PTI Photo/Gurinder Osan)

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Today (July 29) is celebrated world over as the International Tiger Day in a bid to raise awareness on various issues surrounding tiger conservation. It was first instituted in 2010 at the Tiger Summit in St Petersburg, Russia when the 13 tiger range countries came together to create Tx2, the global goal to double the number of wild tigers by the year 2022.

Last year, the designated date for achieving the goals of Tx2, however, saw uneven progress. As per the World Wildlife Fund, while countries in Southeast Asia struggled to control population decline, others, like India, fared much better.

Sachin Tendulkar @sachin_rt · [Follow](#)

Tiger is one of my favourite animals. On [#InternationalTigerDay](#), show me one of the best pictures of Tigers you've clicked in the wild.

Here's one clicked by me.



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“As we have found in the countries where tigers are recovering, **political commitment** is perhaps the most important ingredient in successful tiger conservation,” Ginette Hemley, Senior Vice President for Wildlife Conservation, WWF-US, said in 2022. “Like most cats, tigers breed well when they have enough space, prey and protection. We have proven recovery is achievable **when governments, communities, conservation organizations and other partners work together.**”

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The successes in India can be attributed largely to the success of Project Tiger, which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary earlier this year.

How Project Tiger came about

Project Tiger was launched by the Central government on April 1, 1973, in a bid to promote conservation of the tiger. The programme came at a time when India's tiger population was rapidly dwindling. According to reports, while there were 40,000 tigers in the country at the time of the Independence (in 1947), they were soon reduced to below 2,000 by 1970 due to widespread hunting and habitat destructions.

Concerns around the issue intensified when in 1970, the International Union for Conservation of Nature declared the tiger as an endangered species. Two years later, the Indian government conducted its own tiger census and found that there were only 1,800 of them left in the country.

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To tackle the problem of hunting and poaching of not just tigers but also other animals and birds, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi promulgated the Wildlife Protection Act in 1972. A year later, after a task force urged the government to create a chain of reserves dedicated to tiger preservation, Indira unveiled Project Tiger.

What is Project Tiger?

Launched at the Jim Corbett National Park, the programme was initially started in nine tiger reserves of different States such as Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, covering over 14,000 sq km.

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Notably, Project Tiger didn't just focus on the conservation of the big cats. It also ensured the preservation of their natural habitat as tigers are at the top of the food chain. While inaugurating the programme, Indira, in a statement, said, "The tiger cannot be preserved in isolation. It is at the apex of a large and complex biotope. Its habitat, threatened by human intrusion, commercial forestry and cattle grazing, must first be made inviolate."

Successes and setbacks

Soon after, the number of tigers in India began to rise and by the 1990s, their population was estimated to be around 3,000. However, the success story of Project Tiger suffered a major setback when the local extermination of tigers in Rajasthan's Sariska made headlines in January 2005.

This led then Prime Minister [Manmohan Singh](#) to set up a task force "to shape the future of tiger conservation even before seeing his first tiger — the famed Machhli of Ranthambhore — in May 2005.," [The Indian Express](#) reported. Around a year later, the government reconstituted Project Tiger and established the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

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“The NTCA had more power to check poaching and preserve the tiger population. Its mandate included setting up the Tiger Protection Force and funding the relocation of villages from the protected areas.” wrote V P Singh Badnore, former Governor of Punjab and Administrator, Union Territory of Chandigarh, for the newspaper.

Fifty years of Project Tiger

Today, there are 54 tiger reserves across India, spanning 75,000 sq km. The current population of tigers in the country stands at 3,167 as opposed to 1,411 in 2006, 1,706 in 2010 and 2,226 in 2014. The numbers saw a 6.74 per cent increase since 2018 (when they stood at 2,967), as per figures from the 5th cycle of India's Tiger Census, released by Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier this year to mark 50 years of Project Tiger.

Narendra Modi 
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Nearly 75 per cent of the global tiger population (in the wild) can today be found in India.

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Speaking to PTI in April, Additional Director General of Forests SP Yadav, who is also the member secretary of the NTCA, talked about the future of Project Tiger and said, “The goal would be to have a viable and sustainable tiger population in tiger habitats based on a scientifically calculated carrying capacity. I’m not putting a number (to it) as we cannot increase the tiger population of the country at the same pace because that will result in an increase in conflict with human beings.”

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