

# Anger in India after a man-eating tiger is killed

NEW DELHI

Villagers are relieved, but others are furious and want an investigation

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Days after a man-eating tiger was killed in central India, a backlash is underway, with politicians and animal rights advocates denouncing the killing and a senior government minister threatening legal action against people involved in the hunt.

The female tiger, called T-1 by forest rangers, was believed to have killed at least 13 villagers over the last two years and to have partially eaten several. A military-style operation aimed at tranquilizing and capturing the animal, which had two cubs, ended instead with the tiger's death on Friday night.

India's Supreme Court had ruled in September that the hunters could shoot the tigress if they were left with no other

choice. According to forest officials, that is what happened when it was spotted near the village of Borati, in the state of Maharashtra.

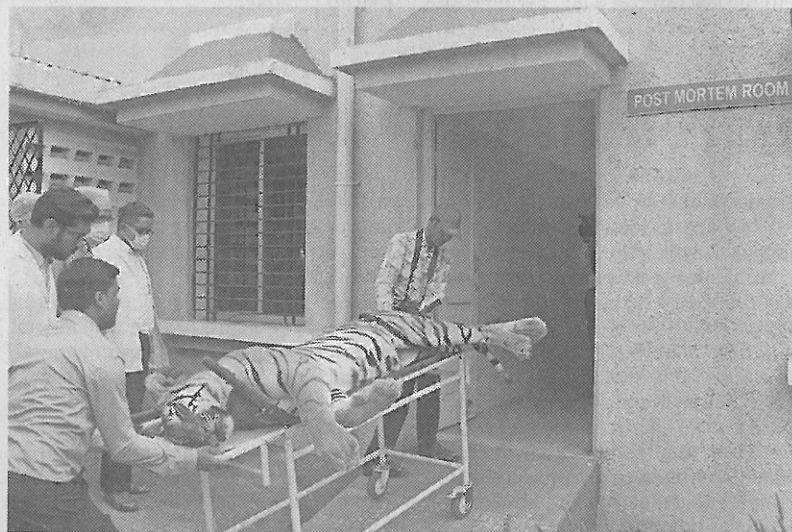
After a group of rangers identified the tigress as T-1, one of them shot her with a tranquilizer dart, officials said. But then she lunged at their open vehicle, and another hunter raised his gun and fired. T-1 died on the spot.

Villagers in the area were relieved. Over the weekend, they threw parties, danced and lit firecrackers. But in other parts of India, the reaction was closer to fury.

Protests broke out in Mumbai. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals India demanded an investigation, saying wildlife protection laws may have been breached. On Twitter, Rahul Gandhi, leader of the opposition Indian National Congress, posted a quote often attributed to Mahatma Gandhi: "The greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

"National shame!" read a poster circulating on social media that depicted the tigress in a pool of blood, an Indian flag draped across her body.

Among the politicians condemning



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The female tiger, known as T-1, being taken to a post-mortem room in Nagpur, India.

the killing was Maneka Gandhi, India's minister for women and child development, who is an animal rights advocate. On Sunday, she called it "patently illegal" and a "ghastly murder" and made

vague threats to pursue legal and criminal penalties against people involved.

Ms. Gandhi accused Nawab Shafath Ali Khan, a celebrity tiger tracker who was involved in the hunt, of gunrunning

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and even murder, offering no evidence. Mr. Khan was not present on Friday when the tiger was killed, but officials said his son had fired the fatal shot.

Mr. Khan said on Tuesday that he was "examining all legal avenues" to bring a suit against Ms. Gandhi. He said his team had followed the Supreme Court's order and that no case against him was pending in any Indian court.

"Animal rights activists take a lot of funds from abroad," he said. "None of them are genuinely interested in wildlife conservation. Their agenda is making money."

The chief minister of Maharashtra, Devendra Fadnavis, said he would order an investigation into the killing of the tiger.

Forest rangers have defended the decision to shoot T-1. Ashok Kumar Mishra, a government conservator in Maharashtra, acknowledged that Friday's developments were not ideal, but he said the end of the hunt was always

going to be a "complicated thing." The criticism on social media, he said, was mostly coming from people far from the scene.

"Rural people who are living this life and understand, they appreciate our efforts," he said. "Unfortunately, all those people are not on Twitter and social media."

The operation to capture T-1 was one of the largest of its kind in India's recent history. Hundreds of forest rangers spent months combing the jungles of Maharashtra looking for tiger tracks, scat and scratches on trees. The hunt involved a heat-seeking drone, more than 100 remote cameras and several specially trained elephants with sharpshooters perched on their backs.

Like 30 percent of India's tigers, T-1 never lived in a dedicated reserve. Even if she had been captured alive, the authorities said, the tigress could never have been reintroduced into the wild.

India's critically endangered tiger population is soaring, from 1,411 in 2006 to an estimated 2,500 today. Tigers are spilling out of reserves and coming into closer contact with humans, sometimes leading to attacks.