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Safari Ban Triggers Economic Distress

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Chorus grows to restore wildlife safaris at Bandipur and Nagarahole Tiger Reserves

Mysore/Mysuru: Following the suspension of **safari** services in Bandipur and Nagarahole Tiger Reserves — after concerns that tourism vehicles might have contributed to recent wildlife attacks — widespread public appeals have emerged urging the Forest Department to resume operations.

Stakeholders argue that the halt has severely hit tourism and disrupted local agricultural markets that depend on visiting tourists.

The suspension was ordered by Forest Minister Eshwar B. Khandre, effective Nov. 8, after four separate tiger attacks in villages bordering Bandipur Forest in Saragur

taluk left three people dead and one farmer critically injured. While the scientific cause of the attacks is still under investigation, some speculated that safari vehicles might have drawn tigers out of the forest and into human settlements.

Economic fallout

The safari ban has caused a sharp decline in tourist footfall to Mysuru and the surrounding region. Farmers from Gundlupet, H.D. Kote, Hunsur and Saragur taluks — who rely on tourist purchases of fruits, vegetables, and flowers — have reported heavy losses.

Many had set up roadside stalls specifically catering to safari visitors, while others earned income by allowing tourists to photograph their sunflower and marigold fields.

Around 2,000 families employed in forest guest houses and resorts, including those run by Jungle Lodges and Resorts (JLR), are now struggling due to a drastic fall in daily earnings. Once-bustling establishments are now nearly deserted.

Environmentalists counter the belief that safaris are mere recreational outings. They stress that regulated safaris serve as important educational platforms that promote wildlife conservation.

Safari vehicles operate without music systems or air conditioning, and tourists are transported in silence to minimise disturbance. The experience introduces visitors to forest ecology, biodiversity and the need to preserve native habitats and species.

No link between safaris, tiger attacks

Wildlife experts have clarified that the recent tiger attacks took place in the Nugu and Hedyala ranges of Saragur taluk, about 100–120 km away from designated safari zones.

They argue that it is implausible for tigers to travel such long distances in response to safari activity, dismissing any direct connection between the two.

Bandipur Tiger Reserve spans nearly 1,200 sq. km across 13 forest ranges, yet safaris are restricted to only about 80 sq. km along the Ooty highway.

Despite thousands of vehicles using this highway daily between 6 am and 9 pm, no significant disturbance to wildlife has been recorded. Safari advocates maintain that holding safari vehicles responsible for recent tiger incursions is unfounded.

Fuels local economies

“Tourists visiting Mysuru often wish to explore the rich biodiversity of Bandipur and Nagarhole forests. Safaris not only introduce visitors to our State’s natural heritage but also significantly boost the local economy,” said B.S. Prashanth, President of Mysore Travels Association.

He emphasised that thousands of families rely directly on safari-related employment. “Without safari operations, these families are left without alternatives. Hotels in the region have invested thousands of crores banking on this tourism appeal. With bookings now being cancelled, hotel and resort owners are in distress,” he noted.

Prashanth added that the ripple effects have struck travel agents, vehicle drivers and tourist guides who facilitate safari visits.

“Safaris have always been conducted with all necessary precautions and no untoward incidents have occurred during safari hours. In light of this, we urge the authorities to take immediate steps to resume safari operations,” he appealed.