KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

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Turning the tide for Malayan tiger conservation

THE announcement on the set-up of a Wildlife Crime Bureau (WCB) by Deputy Inspector-General of Police Datuk Seri Mazlan Lazim presents a gleam of hope in the fight to protect our Malayan tiger.

WWF-Malaysia applauds the police for this welcome announcement, which marks yet another step forward in the fight against wildlife poaching and trafficking.

We also express our appreciation to the Energy and Natural Resources Ministry and Perhilitan for their immense support in leading the charge against wildlife crimes.

With our wild tiger population numbers still below 200, it gives me great hope to see other recent key developments in our fight for the Malayan tiger:

1. In June, the Cabinet had agreed to nine strategic actions for the conservation of the species for a period of 10 years from 2021 to 2030.

2. In September, Energy and Natural Resources Minister Datuk Seri Takiyuddin Hassan announced the formation of the National Conservation Task Force (NCTF) to be chaired by the prime minister, and the set-up of a Tigers Working Group (TWG) to look at ways to increase the tiger population in the wild.

3. In October, the passing of the Wildlife Conservation (Amendment) Bill 2021 by unanimous vote in Parliament marked a timely boost for Malaysia's critically endangered wildlife.

4. Budget 2022 presented in October announced an allocation of RM450 million for environment and biodiversity initiatives.

WWF-Malaysia has advocated for several years the establishment of a wildlife crime unit under the police and a National Tiger Task Force chaired by the highest level of government.

The establishment of similar task force and wildlife crime units in Nepal and India as early as the 1970s was instrumental for the gradual increase of their wild tiger population and this is what we hope to see emulated in Malaysia. It will take time and there is not a second to lose.

Our nation's critically endangered wildlife population has plummeted over just a few decades due to rampant poaching and illegal wildlife trade. If this is allowed to continue unchecked, our forests will be devoid of the wildlife that provide balance to the ecosystem.

The continued presence of tigers in the wild is key to a balanced forest ecosystem, which is crucial for our own long-term survival.

When we protect the tiger's habitat, we protect the various ecosystem services that the forest provides like freshwater, clean air, flood mitigation and other natural resources; all of which benefit us.

With stronger protection, tiger landscapes also store more carbon on average than other forests in the region, helping to mitigate climate change. For many years, we have persevered to protect the Malayan tiger in the wild, through patrolling efforts, advocacy and many meetings to present our research and proposals.

It has been a long journey, and we are now at the cusp where we can turn the tide of extinction for our beloved national icon. With the creation of NCTF, TWG and the WCB, and the whole nation rallying behind this, from our anti-poaching units on the ground to the support of our donors and Maybank, our partner in tiger conservation, Energy and Natural Resources Ministry, the police, Perhilitan, other agencies and non-governmental organisations, we can be on the right track to recovering our wild tiger population.

It does take a nation to save the Malayan tiger. What is important is that we keep up the momentum. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar stated in the Dewan Rakyat that Malaysia is set to lose the Malayan tiger within five to 10 years if no drastic actions are taken immediately.

Implementation of the nine strategic actions is of utmost criticality to save this species, even more urgently now with the Year of the Tiger around the corner. After all, what would the Year of the Tiger mean five years from now if there were no more tigers in the wild? Would we also want our Jata Negara to symbolise a majestic national icon that we were unable to save from extinction?

Sophia Lim
Executive director and chief executive officer
World Wide Fund-Malaysia