

Inbreeding could reduce tiger count, says expert

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Pune: Tiger conservationist Dharmendra Khandal on Saturday drew attention to the problem of inbreeding of tigers in reserves and parks across the country, which could eventually wipe out their population.

Addressing a news conference on the sidelines of the 7th Kirloskar Vasundhara International Film Festival, where he received the 'Vasundhara Mitra' award, Khandal said, "The total number of tigers in the country has grown over the last few years. There are about 50 tigers in Ranthambore national park at present. However, the systematic closure of the tigers' connecting corridor with other national parks means they are inbreeding, which is genetically dangerous."

Khandal also blamed human encroachments, poaching, mining and badly-managed tourism in and

around these tiger reserves for the continued threat to the tiger population in the country.

Describing the success of several anti-poaching and conservatory initiatives for tigers, wolves and gharials in and around Rajasthan in the last decade, Khandal praised the contribution of the project volunteers from Pune, who he described as 'especially driven and zealous'. "We have seen most volunteers coming from Pune and almost a negligible number from Delhi and Jaipur," he said.

Also, present at the conference was environmentalist Ramesh Gauns from Goa, who compared his battle against the illegal nexus of the government-mining lobby of the state with a game of chess, saying he was fighting against odds which required him to always stay two steps ahead.

"When I started my battle, I was



File photo

Khandal also blamed human encroachments, poaching, mining and badly-managed tourism for dwindling tiger population in the country

discouraged by many who said you are banging your head against a rock. But I involved the locals with my slogan 'khaani ya paani' (mining or water), and now every one of them

is standing up against the mining lobby," he said.

Sharing details about the opposition he faced in his fight, Gauns said that environmentalists were always

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Dharmendra Khandal |
TIGER CONSERVATIONIST

condemned by the corporate sector which accused them of being anti-development. Gauns also described the plunder of Goa by miners, saying the state had been ruled by the mining lobby for more than half a century as no one dared to speak against them.