

PRESS RELEASE

First ARF ends with resolve to have an ‘inclusive ranger force’

Guwahati, Dec 8 : The First Asian Ranger Forum (ARF) came to an end here with a clarion call to the international community, governments across the world Ranger Federation of Asia, International Ranger Federation, conservation and other civil society organisations and donor to strive for an inclusive ranger workforce which is crucial to protection of global biodiversity in this critical juncture, Recognising that Asia is home to 70% of the world’s indigenous people and understanding the crucial role indigenous people, local communities, women and other under-represented groups play in effective protected and conserved area management, the ARF in its Guwahati Declaration has underlined the pressing need to improve access to equal opportunity ranger employment without prejudice or any form of discrimination ; put in place anti-discrimination training, policies and monitoring systems that are communicated and enforced throughout all levels of the ranger workforce ; increase support structures, upskilling opportunities and pathways to promotion for under-represented groups in the ranger workforce.

The Guwahati Declaration says “Asia is a highly biodiverse region, yet it has lost half of its natural capital in the last 50 years alone. Rangers serve as critical biodiversity guardians, safeguarding Asia’s rich wildlife and ecosystems and enabling the achievement of the Global Biodiversity Framework’s; target of effectively conserving and managing 30% of planet’s land mass, oceans, coastal areas and inland waters by 2030 (30 by 30).

“Despite their critical importance, rangers are often under-trained, under-recognized and under-equipped. In order to achieve 30 by 30, the world must rapidly scale up both the number of rangers and the management effectiveness of existing and future protected and conserved areas. Given its size and ecological importance, Asia will play a pivotal role in determining whether this global target is met.”

Addressing the closing function of the ARF , MK Yadava, IFS, PCCF and Head of Forest Force (HoFF), Assam hailed the Forest Rangers for their tireless efforts for conservation around the world and emphasized on bringing forward their conservation success stories.

He said, “The rangers, forest guards, foresters, we all are one. We are a common creed and stand united in the adversity of climate change. The impact of climate change is going to be largely visible on the wildlife and biggest on the communities in the fringes of the protected areas and forests. Wildlife has a definite pattern of migration in terms of change but extreme events are hard to anticipate and wildlife becomes the casualty of such extreme events.”

“The impacts of climate change are evident in Assam as well. The most impacted people because of climate change are the poor people living in the fringes of the forest. The rich live in cities and are not impacted by these issues however they have invited different sets of problems by themselves. I believe the Asian Rangers Forum, 2023 has been a success and we shall be happy to host ARF once again in India,” he said.

Chris Galliers, President of International Ranger Federation announced the newly elected committee of Ranger Federation of Asia that has Bunty Tao, India as President and Manav Khadka of Nepal as Vice President, Hanera Aisha as Secretary, Srinath Bhandara as South Asia Representative and Peeranuch Dulkul Kappelle as South East Asia Representative.

The Vice Chair of IUCN WCPA Capacity Development Thematic Group and Director of Protected Area Management at Re:wild Michael Appleton announced the IUCN WCPA Rangers Award at the closing of the ARF. He said these awards recognise the efforts of all the Rangers who are working tirelessly to prove their capabilities, raising their capacities for conservation and protection. The award consists of a certificate and a unique uniform patch.

The closing function of the ARF was also graced by Ms Priya Ghosh, US Embassy and Dr Bibhab Kumar Talukdar, Secretary General and CEO, of Aaranyak. Bunty Tao, Forest Ranger, Kamlang Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh of India and the newly-elected President of Asian Rangers Federation thanked everyone for their faith in him. He humbly said that he is a man born in the Eastern Himalayas to unlettered parents. It would be challenging for him to attend to the diverse Asian landscape comprising marine habitats to highest mountain peaks and sought support and togetherness from all the rangers. He also thanked Assam Forest Department, Aaranyak for making things happen.

Rohit Singh, the outgoing president of Ranger Federation of Asia, was felicitated in the closing programme. He recalled attending World Ranger Congress in 2016 wherein he found only six Rangers from Asia. Therein he thought ‘if we can’t bring Asian to the WRC then we take WRC to Asia.’ He paid tribute to his departed colleague, Wayne Lotter, shot by poachers in Tanzania, who was equally involved to create a platform for Asian Rangers.

Chris Galliers thanked the HOFF, Assam for the hospitality, SG-CEO, Aaranyak and his team for hosting the event, GASFOS for accommodation, Govt. of Assam for transportation , all the sponsors of the 1st ARF including WTI, URSA, IUCN ARO, IUCN WCPA, IRF, TRAFFIC.

The team of ARF delegates were facilitated a jeep safari in the one-horned rhino habitat of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary near here this morning that finally brought the 4-day event to an end.

The ARF held during 5-8 December, was attended by 146 participants from 20 countries, including 89 active rangers. A quarter (25%) of participants were women and 30% identified as indigenous peoples or local community members.

*Press statement issued by Dr Alolika Sinha, Publicity Secretary, Aaranyak.
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