

## MEDIA COMMUNIQUE

### Forest departments of Assam, Meghalaya celebrate World Elephant Day together in N Garo Hills

Guwahati, August 12: With the objective to pave the way for sustained inter-state coordination in the efforts for mitigation of human elephant conflict (HEC) and coexistence, forest departments of Assam and Meghalaya have for the first time celebrated World Elephant Day at Thakurbilla in North Garo Hills in Meghalaya.

The celebration with the theme ‘Safeguarding Elephant Habitats for a Sustainable Tomorrow’ was held on Friday under collaboration of Assam Forest Department, Meghalaya Forest Department, Aaranyak, British Asian Trust with support of Darwin Initiative. The programme was graced by a number dignitaries from both the states and over 300 people from both the states including about 180 village women.

The noted dignitaries who were present in the function included District Commissioner of Goalpara (Assam) Khanindra Choudhury, SP Goalpara Rakesh Reddy, S N Sangma, Conservator of Forest (territorial, wildlife and social forestry) Garo Hills Region, RK Marak, DFO E&W Garo Hills Wildlife, Tura, Tejas Mari Swamy, DFO, Goalpara, Satish K S, DFO (Territorial), E & N Garo Hills and Jude Rangku T Sangma, ADC, North Garo Hills of Meghalaya.

Addressing the gathering as the chief guest, the District Commissioner of Goalpara (Assam), Khanindra Choudhury termed the joint celebration of World Elephant Day by forest departments of Assam and Meghalaya as a momentous moment that marks the beginning of a joint initiative for mitigation of HEC and facilitating coexistence.

“Natural habitats of elephants have shrunk because of expansion of human settlements. We have to sensitise people to respect elephant corridors to mitigate HEC. I am very happy that students have been made part of the programme as it will impress their young minds about importance of the heritage animal in our ecosystem and need to conserve them,” he said.

Goalpara DFO, Tejas Mari Swamy, who had mooted the idea of holding inter-state Elephant Cup football match on the World Elephant Day, stated that coexistence is the only way out of the HEC and for that purpose the support and wisdom of villagers from both the states are required. He called for sustained joint efforts from both the states in this regard.

The ADC, North Garo Hills in Meghalaya, Jude Rangku T Sangma addressing the gathering said elephants are not aware of geographical boundaries created by human beings so there much be coordination amongst human beings living across state boundaries in mitigating HEC and facilitating coexistence.

Aaranyak’s senior biologist Dr Alolika Sinha and Meghalaya Forest Department officer Donme Ch Marak anchored the well-attended programme where a chorus group of students from local

Pedaldoba Secondary School, two Hajong and Rajbonsi community dance troupes performed to enthral the gathering.

The Elephant Conservation Network (ECN) network members from both Garo Hills region and Goalpara were felicitated for their voluntary services towards mitigating human elephant conflict (HEC) and facilitating coexistence.

Earlier in the day the Elephant Day celebration event was kicked off with a friendly football match between two team comprising community members and forest officials from both the States. Forest officials from both the states including the DFO, Goalpara took part in the football match. The match was won by Assam team by a margin of 4-2 goals. This match was preceded by another match between two teams of local children who were later gifted with two footballs.

The event ended with the distribution of mitigation tools, such as rechargeable torch lights and distribution of trophies and cash prizes between the two football teams by dignitaries.

It is worth mentioning that Meghalaya Forest Department has been assisted by scientists of Aaranyak in past one year to generate scientific and conservation information to assist management decisions. Aaranyak and Meghalaya Forest Department signed a MoU on this aspect about a year back

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