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Asian Rhino Range Countries Meeting

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Recently, **2nd meeting of Asian Rhino Range Countries** took place in New Delhi.

- **2nd Asian Rhino Range Countries** meeting in New Delhi was organized by the Union Ministry of the Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), and International Union for Conservation of Nature(IUCN), Asian Rhino Specialist Group along with World Wildlife Fund-India (WWF), International Rhino Foundation and Aaranyak, an NGO.
- 1st Asian Rhino Range States meeting was held at Bandar Lampung, Indonesia in October 2013.
- **Asian Rhino Range Countries include Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nepal.**

Outcome of Meeting

- The **New Delhi Declaration was adopted** at the second meeting of the Asian rhino range countries.

- **New Delhi Declaration**

- New Delhi Declaration underscored **trans-boundary collaboration among India, Nepal, and Bhutan for the conservation and protection of the greater one-horned rhino.**
- Emphasis was also laid on expanding rhino domains within a country or between rhino range countries.
- **Making the best use of all available individuals and technologies to accelerate natural and conservation breeding of the critically endangered Sumatran rhino.**
- **Emulating India**
 - Part of the plan has been to **replicate or develop upon the Kaziranga rhino conservation success story for Sumatran as well as the Javan rhino.**
 - Kaziranga had less than 10 rhinos when it was declared a protected area for the animal in 1905. Assam's Kaziranga National Park has around 2,938 rhinos in India.
- The Asian rhino range countries have also agreed to **review the population of three Asian rhino species (greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatra) in every four years** to secure its future.
- It has also agreed to strengthen protection regimes, intelligence gathering and real-time sharing of intelligence information on rhino crime and its horn trade to secure the rhino population within and between range countries. There were discussions on rhino trade in Asia in the meeting.
- It has said the possible opening of international trade of rhino horn and other derivatives will have a detrimental impact on rhino populations in the Asian rhino range countries.
- The countries have also decided to initiate research on various habitat parameters, including invasive species threatening the suitable habitats of Asian rhinos and take optimally manage the habitats.
- The meeting also decided to identify connectivity and corridors across international boundaries and keep them functional, safe and secure for free movement of Asian rhinos and other wildlife.

Status of Rhinoceros

- **There are three species of rhino in Asia—greater one-horned, Javan and Sumatran.** Javan and Sumatran Rhino are critically endangered but the greater one-horned (or Indian) rhino vulnerable.
- **Once ranging from China to Bangladesh, the Javan and Sumatran rhinos are nearing extinction.**
- There are no rhinos in Bhutan, but some from the Manas National Park in adjoining Assam or Buxa Tiger Reserve in West Bengal are known to cross over occasionally.

- **Indonesia and Malaysia are the other Asian countries where the last of the rhinos live.**
- The current global population of the Indian one-horned rhinoceros is 3,584. Assam's Kaziranga National Park has the bulk of 2,938 rhinos in India while Nepal 646.
- The Sumatran rhino, the smallest of all rhino species and the only Asian rhino with two horns, became extinct in the wild in Malaysia.

National Rhino Conservation Strategy

- Recently, the government of India has also launched the **National Rhino Conservation Strategy for India.**
- **It called for active engagement between India and Nepal to protect the species.**
- The plan said the single population of rhinos in Sukla-Phanta (Nepal), Valmiki Tiger Reserve (India) and Chitwan National Park (Nepal) and Dudhwa (India) is separated by the political boundary between the two countries.
- **Instead of managing the two populations separately in the two countries, it needs to be managed with the same protocol.**
- The strategy would pave the path for long-term conservation of rhinos.
- The plan calls for expanding distribution range as the occurrence of 90% of the rhino in one protected area is a cause of concern and conservation of existing and potential rhino habitats need to be made a national priority.
- It also calls for strengthening protection, having dedicated research and monitoring and strict enforcement.