

Experts question rhino horn panel



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Azlina Khanam 2 September 2016 Updated 3 Sept 8209 views

A citizens' meet on Thursday unanimously demanded disbanding of the [Rhino](#) Horns Verification Committee, recently formed by the Government of Assam, [as](#) in its opinion, the committee is out to legalize all irregularities by those involved in killing and poaching of rhinos and selling their horns.

Held at Guwahati Press Club and jointly organized by [Nature](#)'s Beckon and the [Journalists](#)' Forum, Assam ([JFA](#)), the meeting also demanded of the authorities to make public the total number of horns from the rhinos naturally dead and those recovered after being killed by the poachers. But this number too must be arrived at after putting each and every horn to forensic tests. Presided [over](#) by [JFA chief](#) Rupam Baruah, and attended by leading intellectuals, journalists and nature-lovers, the meeting strongly advocated a CBI inquiry into all the murky incidents of killing and poaching of the [animal](#) and trading of its horns. The CBI probe should also include the dubious role being played by the [Rhino](#) Horns Verification Committee, the citizens said. Voicing his concern, renowned litterateur and journalist, Homen [Borgohain](#) said the [Rhino](#) Horns Verification Committee appears to be in a mission to bestow legal sanction on the irregularities so far indulged in by the captains of illegal [rhino trade](#). This committee has no moral right to exist, he added.

Mrinal Saikia, the ruling party MLA from Khumtai, said numerous incidents of killing and poaching of rhinos had taken place during Mohan Chandra Malakar's tenure [as](#) the principal [chief](#) conservator of forests, wildlife. This clearly creates a conflict of interests when he took [over as](#) chairman of the verification committee, he said and added that neither he should have been made its chairman nor should he have accepted the post.

Soumyadeep Dutta, director, [Nature](#)'s Beckon, in his speech, asked how come the Department of Forest, Assam boasted of selling rhino horns till 1979 [as](#) the Indian [Wildlife](#) Protection [Act](#) had already been enacted in 1972, which banned sale and purchase of animals and their meat. It means, Dutta pointed out, the department openly declared its complicity in an illegal [act](#).

Anuradha Sharma Pujari, Editor, Sadin, said the verification committee has lost all its credibility in its short span of existence. Asom Bani Editor, Dilip [Chandan](#) sought the immediate intervention of Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal in the issue.

Ranen Kumar Goswami, senior journalist, also a [JFA](#) member, criticized a section of journalists for their audacity in behaving [as](#) self-styled spokespersons of the media. These journalists, involved neck-deep in the committee, have done all they could to suppress transparency instead of promoting it, he said. By killing transparency and preventing what happened behind the iron curtain from being disseminated, these journalists appear to have surrendered their professional ethics to the willful wrong-doers in illegal forest [trade](#), he further said.

Earlier, [JFA](#) secretary Nava Thakuria in his welcome speech, said the recent recovery of five fake rhino horns has proved beyond [doubt](#) the unholy alliance between corrupt officials and perpetrators of [criminal](#) acts. Others, who spoke on the occasion, included senior journalists Apurba Ballabh Goswami, Pulin Kalita and [Chandan](#) Duara, wildlife activists Mubina Akhtar, Jainal Abedin, Indrajit Dutta, Nitul Nath and Padum Barthakur, science [writer](#) Jagadindra Raichoudhury and rhino researcher Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya.

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BY AZLINA KHANAM

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