

JFA demands forensic test of rhino horns in forest custody



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Journalists' Forum Assam (JFA) has morally supported the concern of Assam Governor Padmanabha Balakrishna [Acharya](#) for the conservation of wildlife, particularly the one-horned rhinoceros and demanded the State forest department to come clear on the rhino horns in its custody.

Unlike many Constitutional Heads of States in India, newly sworn-in Assam Governor (in addition to [Nagaland](#) and [Tripura](#)) has been raising voices for the conservation of rhinos in various forest reserves of Assam.

Governor [Acharya](#) has termed the rhino poachers as the enemy of the nation, who 'dared to challenge the authority'. The Governor even opined that the State forest minister must take the moral responsibility to protect the animals.

The rhinos are poached for its horns, which have high market values in China and some Southeast Asian countries where they believe that the horn has medicinal values and use it as aphrodisiac.

Assam has over 2550 one-horned rhinos (out of 3,300 world population) in wild spreading in various protected forest reserves including [Kaziranga National](#) Park, which is also a UNESCO world heritage site. Though the giant [animal](#) is protected under India's powerful wildlife protection act which has been under implementation in the entire country since 1972, Assam continues to lose the precious rhinos. This year Assam has lost [6](#) rhinos to poachers till date. Last year, over 30 rhinos were poached and the year 2013 witnessed the killing of over 40 rhinos, where most cases were reported from the [Kaziranga](#).

Earlier Governor [Acharya](#) issued a statement raising serious question over the efficiency of the State forest staff in checking the rampant poaching of rhinos in various forest reserves. The Governor even suggested that the [Kaziranga](#) should be brought under the vigil of Indian Army personnel to safeguard the wonderful creatures. “The illegal [trade](#) of rhino horns must be stopped to preserve the animals both in Asia and Africa. We suspect that there might be somebody in the forest department who is maintaining links with the traders in international market,” said a statement issued by JFA president Rupam Barua and secretary Nava Thakuria.

“The state forest department, during its operations [against](#) the poachers and illegal traders of rhino horns, has recovered several rhino horns and those were kept in the department’s custody. However, there has not been any verification of the horns in forest department’s custody for a long time to ascertain their genuineness. We believe that the some suspected elements would always try to take away rhino horns from the custody of the forest department replacing those with fake horns with an aim to sell in the foreign market for their selfish interests,” they said.

“We feel the people of Assam have the right to know whether the poachers and trader of rhino horns have already punched a hole in the forest department and taken away the horns to be sold in the international market,” the statement said.

“Unless the people of Assam are made aware of the proper data of real (original) rhino horns in the government custody, the inherent [trade](#) may continue. Hence we demand for an immediate forensic test of all rhino horns preserved by the authority and make the statistics public,” concluded the JFA statement.

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