

Indian Rhino Vision 2020 misfires: another trans-located rhino dies



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An ideal habitat for the breeding of rhinos, [Kaziranga](#) has seen a rise in the number of the species. The [animal](#) shrugged off its 'endangered' tag [as soon as](#) its population crossed the 2000 mark. This fuelled an overweening strategy--the much hyped Indian [Rhino](#) Vision -- that targeted 3,000 rhinos by the year 2020 in the [rhino](#)-bearing sanctuaries of Assam. However, with the number of this pre-historic pachyderm crossing the 2,500 mark, a host of challenges also came to the fore, poaching being only one of the concerns. [Kaziranga](#) has been plagued by other challenges like-- shrinking of the habitat, encroachment of the corridors around the Park, siltation of the water bodies and a complete lack of protection of the watershed of [Kaziranga](#). The conservation of rhinos in [Kaziranga](#) started almost 110 years ago but conservation seems more in jeopardy now than it was a century back! With the growth of wild life population [as](#) well [as](#) the ever swelling human habitations in and around the Park, it has become a daunting task to meet these challenges without proper advisory and practice.

Instead of dealing with the long-term conservation challenges and preservation of this unique site, the Indian [Rhino](#) Vision only went on pulling out rhinos from [Kaziranga](#) and Pobitora for translocation solely keeping in view the magic figure of 3,000 rhinos by 2020. Manas [National](#) Park, another World Heritage Site and Laokhowa and Burhachapori [Wildlife](#) Sanctuaries remained preferred destinations for the translocation of rhinos under the IRV 2020 initiative. However, translocation to these [wildlife](#) areas remains a daunting task [as](#) these sanctuaries continue to be vulnerable. Rhinos were falling prey to poachers and the slaughter and maiming of the species continued unabated. [Poaching](#) of even trans-located rhinos overshadowed the whole IRV process.

Started on April 12, 2008, IRV's translocation process came under the scanner after more than half of the trans-located rhinos to Manas fall

prey to the [bullets](#) of poachers. Without adequate patrolling staff, it was a colossal task for a few people to constantly guard the animals [against](#) human rapacity. The killing of these trans-located animals since 2011 in Manas World Heritage Site triggered the World Heritage Committee to send an alarm to the [state](#) that further deterioration of protection in Manas and subsequent damage caused to key attributes in Manas may [lead](#) to de-listing Manas from the World Heritage Site list.

Even after the debacle at Manas, the IRV stakeholders did not seem to learn the basics: to tighten up the protective mechanism in the sanctuaries that are soft targets for the poachers. They even went on for a temporary band-aid effort of "trimming" horns on rhinos to be trans-located to Burhachapori and also on stray rhinos. The decision, taken at the IRV 2020 partners meeting on January 30, 2014 at the Assam [State](#) Zoo was met with strong opposition from conservationists and the [state](#) forest department was compelled to abandon the idea.

Conservationists were of the view that security assessment is a must for translocation. The Assam [Environment NGO](#) Forum said—"If the government is unsure of the security in the targeted area, in this case Laokhowa and Burhachpori [Wildlife](#) Sanctuary, then translocation should be postponed till such time [as](#) the government is confident of its security apparatus." But the stakeholders of IRV went on with their program of translocation and sent a mother rhino with its calf to the Boma (enclosure barricaded with thorny bushes and electric fence) in Burhachapori "to ensure [success](#) of translocation" that instead became the death knell for the duo.

An official of the Assam forest department, on conditions of anonymity, said, “Rhinos endure a certain amount of stress during the translocation process. It was a terrible sight-- when after regaining consciousness-- the mother [rhino](#) wounded itself with multiple injuries each time it stumbled on the thorny barrier in the effort to free itself from captivity. Further, the mother suffered a grave cut in the ear during notching, that turned septic and the [animal](#) died a slow and painful death last March. The orphaned calf was alone since March. The trauma the calf suffered after the ordeal it had gone through during the recent floods coupled with serious stomach ailments finally brought the end to the poor [animal](#).” The rhino calf died.

Setback for IRV

The death of the rhinos in Burhachapori has become a huge setback for the IRV 2020 programme. There were allegations that the IRV stakeholders simply washed off their hands once translocation process was [over](#); they were never bothered about the safety of the trans-located animals. This was indeed a grave allegation. The death of rhinos not only contradicts the conservation efforts but undoubtedly overshadowed the whole IRV process.

After the debacle at Burhachapori, many conservation NGOs of the [state](#) were seen protesting [against](#) the translocation programme of IRV. They held responsible the IRV stakeholders—Assam Forest Department, The Bodoland Territorial Council, International [Rhino](#) Foundation, [US](#) Fish and [Wildlife](#) Service and WWF--- for the death of at least 13 rhinos-- those trans-located from [Kaziranga](#) and Pobitora. [Kaziranga Wildlife](#) Society, Early Birds, Aranya Suraksha Samity, Green Guard, The Green Society and Centre for [Conservation](#), [Education](#) and Research demanded the forest department to [stop](#) the translocation process at once. The NGOs allege that translocation was carried out without prior and proper security arrangement of the targeted area. There were also severe allegations of negligence towards security and health monitoring of the animals. The NGOs further demanded the government to institute an inquiry into the death of all trans-located rhinos and at once make public the post mortem report of the female rhino died in the 'Boma' in Burhachapori last March.

Several [student](#) organizations including the [Asom](#) Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad also came out to voice their concern [against](#) killing of rhinos in the name of “translocation” under Indian [Rhino](#) Vision 2020---a [policy](#) that misfired!

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