

Wildlife network of South Asian countries to get more teeth

The South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN), an inter-governmental wildlife law enforcement agency, in its first ever meeting in India, adopted many resolutions to curb wildlife crime in the region.

At the two-day conference held here from May 8-10, representatives of seven out of eight countries participated, and the members agreed on having an operational framework for strengthening the regional body to combat wildlife crime.

Major challenge

Underlining the fact that wildlife crime is one the major conservation challenges for the world, Man Bahadur Khadka, chief enforcement coordinator of SAWEN, said that during the meet six proposals, including tracking of wildlife smuggling route, review of existing laws and a structure for the organisation were tabled.

“Members have given their views at the meeting, the SAWEN secretariat will look into their suggestions and after taking them into consideration, make these documents public,” Mr. Khadka told *The Hindu* .

Members of all participant countries — India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan —except Pakistan participated in the meeting.

SAWEN was launched in Bhutan in 2011 and in 2016 the Union Cabinet gave permission to adopt the statute of SAWEN.

According to Mr. Khadka the most smuggled wildlife items in the region are leopard skin and bones, pangolin scales, rhino horns and endangered birds.

Indian connection

“India is a source country for smuggling of species of both plants and animals. Most of these wildlife products are smuggled to South East Asia and China and the route goes through the country along with neighbouring countries,” said Agni Mitra, regional deputy director, Eastern Region Wildlife Crime Control Bureau.

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