

'Gaj Yatra' honours Meghalaya's elephant corridor effort

Dignitaries flagging off the campaign. Special arrangement

In 2014, villagers in Meghalaya's Garo Hills set aside a part of their community-owned land to create village reserve forests, giving right of passage to elephants.

In acknowledgement of that gesture, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) on Monday rolled out the 'Gaj Yatra' from Tura, the principal town of Garo Hills.

People's initiative

'Gaj Yatra', a "journey celebrating India's national heritage animal", aims at securing 100 elephant corridors across India. Four of these are in Meghalaya, including the Siju-Rewak corridor that some 1,000 elephants use to travel between the Balpakram and Nokrek National Parks in the State.

"The campaign has aptly been launched in the Garo Hills, where the people have created community forests for human-elephant harmony and conservation of animals such as hoolock gibbon," Vivek Menon, executive director of WTI, said after the four-day campaign was flagged off.

The event involves taking an elephant mascot across districts frequented by jumbo herds for generating awareness among the people.

Meghalaya Home Minister James K. Sangma said the 'Gaj Yatra' could go a long way in providing space for elephants to move. "There have been 14,700 cases of man-animal conflicts that may have occurred due to space constraint and less food available," he said.

He underlined the role of Nokmas, traditional custodians of the land, in supporting the move towards co-existence between man and animal and helping conservationists for the success of the initiative. Expansion of human settlements have resulted in fragmented elephant habitats in the Garo Hills, leading to conflicts.

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