

Bangladesh calls for stronger regional action against wildlife crime

Bangladesh Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Abdul Awal Mintoo has called for stronger regional cooperation to combat transnational and organised wildlife crime in South Asia, urging countries to improve intelligence-sharing, coordinate law enforcement and conduct joint operations.

Mintoo made the remarks Thursday while speaking at the first General Assembly of the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) in Kathmandu, Nepal.

“Wildlife and ecosystems do not recognize political borders,” the minister said, noting that criminal networks exploit borders, transportation systems, commercial channels, online platforms and financial systems to conduct transnational wildlife trafficking.

He said law-enforcement efforts should go beyond seizing wildlife and arresting offenders to identifying, investigating and dismantling the organisers, financiers and criminal networks behind such crimes.

Every seizure, he said, should be treated as an opportunity to gather intelligence, including determining where the wildlife originated, the routes used, who was involved, who financed the operation and where the wildlife was being sent.

Mintoo also stressed the importance of online monitoring, cyber investigations and digital evidence in tackling wildlife crime conducted online. He called for financial investigations, asset tracing and anti-money-laundering measures, in accordance with national laws, in major wildlife crime cases.

He further urged greater use of wildlife forensics, DNA analysis, digital forensics and geospatial technologies, alongside joint training and exchanges of expertise among SAWEN member countries.

The minister also called for stronger regional cooperation in the rescue, rehabilitation and repatriation of seized live wildlife.

On the SAWEN Strategic Plan 2026-2030, Minto said the proposed plan offered an opportunity to turn these priorities into a specific and practical regional programme of action.

Bangladesh supports a plan that prioritises intelligence-sharing, law enforcement, criminal justice, digital and financial investigations, science and forensics, capacity development and reducing demand for wildlife, he said.

Minto said SAWEN's first General Assembly had created an opportunity to turn political commitments into concrete action. He expressed hope that member countries would leave Kathmandu with a shared commitment to establish stronger intelligence-sharing mechanisms, carry out practical joint operations and dismantle criminal networks threatening wildlife.

He reiterated that Bangladesh was ready to work with all SAWEN member countries, international organisations and development partners to build a strong, interconnected and effective regional wildlife law-enforcement system.

The conference was attended by Nepal's House of Representatives Speaker Dol Prasad Aryal, Nepal's Minister for Agriculture, Forest and Environment Gita Chaudhary, SAWEN Secretary General Dr Krishna Prasad Acharya and representatives from organisations and from Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Pakistan, the Maldives and Bangladesh.