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Rhino Returns To Forest Cleared Of Encroachment In Assam

Choudhury said that the rhino most likely came out from Kaziranga National Park and reached Pava.

Written By [Press Trust Of India](#)

Image: PTI

Days after encroachments were cleared from almost 90 per cent area of Pava Reserve Forest in Assam's Lakhimpur district, a one-horned rhino was spotted in the evicted site, bringing cheers to wildlife protectors, officials said on Wednesday.

According to Lakhimpur Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Ashok Kumar Dev Choudhury, the adult rhino was seen roaming on Tuesday in the villages that were cleared of encroachment from the Reserve Forest.

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Choudhury said that the rhino most likely came out from Kaziranga National Park and reached Pava.

"If the public cooperates with us, we will send it back to Kaziranga again," he added.

Some experts, however, opined that this lone rhino probably lost its path and strayed into the village lands, now freed from encroachment, inside Pava.

The administration had started an eviction drive to clear encroachment on January 10, which continued for several days, to evict around 500 "illegal settler" families.

Expressing happiness over spotting the rhino inside Pava Reserve Forest, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the animals were seen in the land freed from encroachment just a few days ago.

"The gentle giant returning to Pabho (Pava) RF is a wonderful news for all wildlife enthusiasts," he tweeted.

The DFO said that out of the original 46 sq km Pava Reserve Forest in 1941, only 0.32 sq km were free and the rest all occupied (encroached) before the eviction started.

Altogether 701 families had encroached upon the Pava Reserve Forest land over the last three decades, he added.

The Assam government had carried out the eviction drive to clear encroachment from 450 hectares of forest land, where people had constructed residential units, Choudhury said.

Apart from these locations, a large area of the forest was allegedly encroached and turned into agricultural land inside Pava, he added.

Wildlife worker Hamidur Rahman, who spotted the rhino first in the Pava on Tuesday, said the Reserve Forest was once a famous game sanctuary full of wild buffaloes, one-horned rhinos, leopards and tigers more than three decades ago.

"Wild animals never forget their tracks and footprints. Having seen their habitat free, the wild animals have started coming to Pava. It is a very good sign," he added.

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