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Kaziranga Elevated Wildlife Corridor — When a Highway Learns to Share Space with Rhinos

17 January 2026

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Kaziranga Elevated Wildlife Corridor — When a Highway Learns to Share Space with Rhinos

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WHY IN NEWS

The Rs 6,956-crore Kaziranga Elevated Wildlife Corridor project on NH-715 (Kaliabor–Numaligarh section, Assam) received 18 contractor bids — advancing toward construction. PM Modi formally inaugurated related works on January 18, 2026. The project is India’s most ambitious attempt to reconcile highway expansion with wildlife conservation: a 34.5 km elevated road section that allows one-horned rhinos, elephants, and tigers to pass freely underneath during their annual monsoon migration.

KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK — CONSERVATION CONTEXT

Kaziranga National Park (UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1985) is located in the **Golaghat and Nagaon districts of Assam**, spread across the **Brahmaputra floodplain** on its southern bank. It is globally recognised as the world’s most successful conservation story for a single mega-fauna species:

The one-horned rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) at Kaziranga:

1904 population estimate: approximately **12 animals**

2024 census: **2,613 rhinos** (approximately **70% of the world’s total wild one-horned rhino population**)

IUCN status: **Vulnerable (V)** on the IUCN Red List; CITES: Appendix I

WPA 1972: **Schedule I** (highest protection)

Kaziranga’s broader wildlife:

India’s **highest density of tigers** per unit area (94 tigers as of 2022, despite relatively small area)

India’s **largest population of wild Asian elephants** (1,300+ elephants)

Over 480 species of birds — designated as an **Important Bird Area (IBA)**

Five major rivers cut through the park; extreme seasonal flooding is part of the ecosystem

The annual monsoon migration: Every June–October, as the Brahmaputra floods Kaziranga (submerging 80–90% of the park), all large mammals — rhinos, elephants, deer, and tigers — **migrate south across NH-715 to the Karbi Anglong highlands**. This crossing is their ancient, instinctive survival route. The highway, expanded in successive decades, turned this migration corridor into a killing field.

THE HIGHWAY PROBLEM — NH-715 AS A DEATH TRAP

NH-715 (formerly NH-37) is a major highway linking Guwahati to Jorhat (Assam) — passing directly through Kaziranga National Park for approximately 39 km. It is one of Assam's busiest highways, carrying heavy goods vehicles, tourist traffic, and inter-city transport.

The mortality data:

A **Wildlife Institute of India (WII) study (2016–17)** found **63 large animals killed in a single year on NH-715** — including rhinos, elephants, and tigers

Road kill on this stretch has been documented since the 1990s; large mammals were killed by speeding trucks, buses, and private vehicles

During monsoon flood months, the frequency of crossings peaks — and so does mortality

Existing mitigation (partial):

Speed restrictions (40 km/h) during monsoon months — often violated

Warning signs and flashing lights at animal crossing points — insufficient

Wildlife crossing underpasses at some locations — used by smaller animals; rhinos and elephants rarely use narrow underpasses

The fundamental problem: road kills cannot be eliminated on a surface-level highway through active wildlife habitat. Animals respond to instinct, not traffic signs. The only solution is **physical separation** — an elevated road above the animal crossing zone, or tunnels beneath it.

THE ELEVATED CORRIDOR SOLUTION — PROJECT ARCHITECTURE

The **Kaziranga Elevated Wildlife Corridor and Highway Expansion** project was conceived as a holistic solution that simultaneously:

Expands NH-715 to four lanes (addressing the highway's capacity and safety limitations for human traffic)

Elevates the highway for 34.5 km through the most sensitive wildlife crossing zones (providing unimpeded animal passage below)

Creates bypass roads at Jakhlabandha (9 km) and Bokakhat (12 km) to divert through-traffic away from the park entirely

Project specifications:

Total project cost: Rs 6,956 crore

Implementing agency: NHIDCL (National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited)

Ministry: Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH)

Construction timeline: 36 months

Elevated section: 34.5 km (provides 4–6 m clearance; sufficient for elephant, rhino, and tiger passage)

Four-laning: 30 km of existing highway

Bypasses: Jakhalabandha (9 km) + Bokakhat (12 km) = 21 km total bypass roads

NBWL governance: The **National Board for Wildlife (NBWL)** — which is chaired by the **Prime Minister** and whose Standing Committee (SCNBWL) is chaired by the **Environment Minister** — approved the project with **34 specific conditions**, including:

Strict speed limits (max 40 km/h in certain sections)

Solar-powered wildlife warning systems

Night-time vehicle restrictions in sensitive months

Specific wildlife crossing structures with vegetated approach channels

Quarterly monitoring reports to NBWL

NHIDCL — INDIA'S NORTHEAST HIGHWAY AGENCY

NHIDCL (National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited) is a Government of India enterprise under MoRTH, established specifically to plan, develop, and maintain national highways and strategic roads in the **border states and Northeast India**.

Feature	NHAI	NHIDCL
Full name	National Highways Authority of India	National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation
Established	1988 (statutory; NHAI Act 1988)	2014
Geography	Pan-India national highway network	Border states + Northeast India specifically
Legal structure	Statutory authority	Government company (under Companies Act)
Key projects	NHDP (National Highways Development Project), expressways	Northeast and border connectivity

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT — THE LARGER PATTERN

The Kaziranga corridor is not an isolated problem — it is part of India’s emerging challenge of managing human-wildlife conflict as both infrastructure expansion and wildlife populations grow simultaneously.

The paradox of conservation success: India’s conservation policies (Project Tiger, Project Elephant, rhino protection) have grown wildlife populations beyond historical levels. But that success generates new pressures: animals disperse into human-dominated landscapes; corridors narrow; infrastructure cuts through migration routes.

Policy frameworks for wildlife-safe infrastructure:

Wildlife Corridors Policy (2022): India identified 32 critical wildlife corridors; implementation remains partial

NBWL Environmental Assessment: All infrastructure within 10 km of a Protected Area requires NBWL/SCNBWL clearance; projects within the PA boundary require cabinet-level clearance

Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ): Buffer zones around national parks where development is regulated (but not prohibited)

The model value of Kaziranga: If successful, the elevated corridor provides a replicable model for other hotspots — including **Pench Tiger Reserve (NH-44)**, **Bandipur-Mudumalai (NH-212)**, and **Ranthambhore (NH-52)** — where highways bisect wildlife habitats with significant kill rates.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Prelims: Kaziranga NP (Assam; UNESCO WHSite 1985; Golaghat + Nagaon districts; one-horned rhino); NHIDCL (vs NHAI; border states); NBWL (chaired by PM; SCNBWL chaired by Environment Minister); one-horned rhino IUCN (Vulnerable), CITES (Appendix I), WPA (Schedule I); Karbi Anglong (highland plateau, Assam); WII (Wildlife Institute of India; Dehradun; autonomous body under MoEFCC).

Mains GS-3: Human-wildlife conflict in the context of conservation success | Infrastructure in Protected Area buffers — NBWL governance and conditions | Elevated corridors as policy model for wildlife-safe highways | Kaziranga’s monsoon ecology — flood, migration, and habitat dynamics | India’s tiger and rhino conservation architecture.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA
KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK — CORE DATA:

Location: Golaghat and Nagaon districts, Assam; Brahmaputra south bank

UNESCO World Heritage Site: 1985

Area: 859 sq km (core) + buffer; total landscape ~1,307 sq km

One-horned rhino: 2,613 (2024 census); ~70% of world population

Tiger: 94 (2022 Tiger Census); highest density per unit area in India

Elephants: 1,300+ wild Asian elephants

Birds: 480+ species; Important Bird Area (IBA)

Floods: 80–90% of park submerges annually during Brahmaputra monsoon floods

ONE-HORNED RHINOCEROS (RHINOCEROS UNICORNIS):

IUCN: Vulnerable (population growing)

CITES: Appendix I (trade prohibited)

WPA 1972: Schedule I

Range: Kaziranga (Assam) and Chitwan NP (Nepal) — main strongholds

Horn composition: keratin (not ivory); illegal trade for traditional medicine

Kaziranga anti-poaching: special rhino protection force; highest protection in any Indian PA

KAZIRANGA ELEVATED CORRIDOR — PROJECT DATA:

Highway: NH-715 (Kaliabor–Numaligarh section, Assam)

Elevated section: 34.5 km; clearance: 4–6 m

Total cost: Rs 6,956 crore; implementing agency: NHIDCL

Ministry: MoRTH; NBWL conditions: 34; construction: 36 months

Also includes: 30 km four-laning + 21 km bypasses (Jakhalabandha + Bokakhat)

Bids: 18 contractor bids received (January 2026)

NHIDCL:

Full name: National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited

Under: MoRTH

Established: 2014 (Government company)

Focus: National highways + strategic roads in border states and Northeast India

NBWL (NATIONAL BOARD FOR WILDLIFE):

Chaired by: Prime Minister

SCNBWL (Standing Committee): chaired by Union Environment Minister

Function: Grants clearances for projects in/around Protected Areas

Key legislation: Wildlife Protection Act 1972, Section 38 (powers of NBWL)

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Karbi Anglong: highland plateau district, Assam; Kaziranga animals' monsoon refuge

WII (Wildlife Institute of India): autonomous body under MoEFCC; Dehradun; conducts wildlife surveys

India's Critical Wildlife Corridors (2022): 32 corridors identified; partial implementation

Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ): MoEFCC-declared; regulated (not prohibited) development within 10 km of PAs

Sources: NHIDCL, Down to Earth, WII, PIB

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