

INTERNATIONAL
THE NEWS

Turtles in trouble

For the nations of the Subcontinent, including Pakistan and India, it is essential to work together not only for the sake of the people of the region but also the wildlife which depends on action by humans to save it from extinction. Members of a regional task force from Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have made a desperate call at a meeting in Colombo to take measures to stop the decimation of marine turtles, animals that have been around for 200 million years and thrive in the waters of the Subcontinent's coast, but are today under threat because of pollution, overfishing, the destruction of their habitats, rising temperatures and growing human populations. The taskforce which met in Colombo comprises experts and officials from each country and has already signed a Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding, aimed at protecting the migratory species. The gathering in Colombo also provided a rare opportunity for experts from across the region to discuss problems and share experiences. From Pakistan, marine experts pointed out that the Olive Ridley turtle, which had nested on the coast of Karachi for years, had not been spotted making its way to a now polluted and dangerous shore since 2013. The Hawkesbay area is one of the rare places in the world where the turtle, which is still found in waters off Pakistan's shores, returns annually to build nests and lay eggs. Ensuring the turtles can safely do this is essential to safeguarding their future.

Problems similar to those faced by Pakistan, including the hauling in of turtles as by-catch and abandoned fishing nets left in the sea by fishermen in which turtles became caught, have also been experienced in the other nations of South Asia. Given that issues like pollution and climate change cannot be controlled by any nation alone, it is crucial that collective action be taken. The WWF in Pakistan, which says turtles have not nested on Karachi's beaches for nearly 13 years, has been active in educating fishermen and communities on the need to safeguard turtles, free them from nets and prevent visitors in an increasingly crowded area from destroying the eggs or disturbing the turtles through their activities. There are also complex ecosystem difficulties associated with the potential loss of turtles. Experts warn that if the turtle population decreases, plankton and algae on which they feed will grow unabated, ruining the balance of the food chain underwater. Saving wildlife and ecosystems is a responsibility in which the entire region must share, putting aside political hostilities for this purpose. If they fail to do so, they will have deprived future generations of an opportunity to experience a significant part of life while also ruining the systems which have for centuries allowed our oceans and our planet to survive.