

FORESTS: COUNTRYWIDE EFFORTS TO PROTECT THEM OR EFFORTS OF A FEW TO DESTROY THEM

- The J&K government has ordered a probe into the illegal constructions in the high profile green belt area around the Dal Lake which includes official residence of former Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and DGP A K Suri, guest house of J&K Bank and 35 other structures. The report was demanded in two months.
- The Deccan Herald reported the citizens of Mysore's demand of a green cover around the city to protect the Chamundi Hills and its Eco-System. The hills come under reserve forests and are ecologically strategic besides being home to a variety of flora and fauna. The forests act as a carbon sink for the city.
- Sandalwood trees worth 25 lakh rupees hacked down in Pune. The hackers resorted to brutal measures to stop the officers from hampering their activities.
- Over three thousand trees to be cut to make way for widening of NH8. Even trees on central verge not to be spared. The city government's forest officials say they are trying their best to save as many trees as possible.
- Check dams in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary have rekindled the lost Aravalli vegetation in the forest which had earlier been replaced by the desert vegetation still rampant in most parts of the sanctuary.
- Development activities like agriculture, roads, mining etc are eating away the rich forest cover of Uttara Kannada. The writer urges the authorities to check this and also move towards protecting them with help from the people.
- The Gujarat government unearthed a Rs. 2000 crores scam involving encroachments over 60,000 acres of land belonging to sanctuaries, reserved forests and protected forests in Vadodara, Bharuch and Panchamahals.
- Indian express reports that the State of forests in India report state that the total coverage of forests in India has for the first time become 20%. Increasing by nearly 2,000sq. Kms and nearly 6% since 1999.

- SC has ordered the Power Grid and the forest departments to cut only 6,000 trees and not 30,000 as planned earlier. To raise the height of towers and cut only trees 3mts under the transmission lines and 4mts in the periphery of the towers. The lines are to take electricity from Tehri Dam to power hungry UP.
- The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has reported a society in the Lok Ayukt, whose residents are top IAS officials for illegally hacking trees. Court asks municipality to save mangroves in the Versova area.
- The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Ms. Jayalalitha today urged the people of the state not to cut trees as felling of trees and excessive use of groundwater has led to the present conditions of drought in the state. Sanctioned Rs. 779 crores for development of degraded forest land.
- Wasteland not notified under forest land, licensed out to political bigwigs for personal gains by the govt in Himachal Pradesh. Centre intervenes only after elections and asks for withdrawal of licenses. This is in spite of the fact that hundreds of acres of land come under fire during summers.
- Court asks Orissa govt to remove encroachments from coastal areas and prosecute guilty officers. The govt. apathetic attitude favours smugglers to destroy bio-diversity of area. CRPF stepped in to help.
- Prior to 1996 the forest cover in Andhra Pradesh which was decreasing, is now showing signs of revival and so is the population of forest wild animals.
- An eco tourism conservation camp along with an eco museum in the Sunderbans reserve forests. The first of its kind, this has been set up to prevent poaching and smuggling of timber. A 33ft nature observatory tower too has been set up to enable panoramic viewing of the forest.
- Lessons on how to make Delhi green can be learnt from the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) who have relocated the uprooted trees during the construction work. Out of the 677 trees relocated 431 managed to survive.
- UP is extensively growing Jatropha saplings, whose seed can be used as a substitute to diesel and other fossil fuels, for the Railways. The use of seed has been known for long but it is being commercially exploited for the first time. The seed can be used to run furnaces, engines and produce electricity.

- The Amabala Shimla highway is dotted with patches of concrete violating the forest cover along the road. Shop owners and other commercial outfits simply pave the area outside their plots without due permission from MoEF for change of land use in a forest land.
- Interestingly where the country is complaining about lack of forest cover, Nagaland on the contrary is complaining excessive forest cover. Areas were brought under plantation under The Nagaland Empowerment of People through Economic Development Project. The trees are now ready to be cut but the court order banning felling of trees has led to excessive forest cover.
- The tale of illegal felling of trees in the Shivalik foothills under the state of Punjab has been patronized by all governments for the past 50 years or so, since independence. Capt. Amrinder Singh govt ordered a probe and dismissed the minister for forests Mr. Lachmann Singh, but anomalies have been detected in the report.
- Lahaul Valley in Himachal Pradesh has been facing xeric (extremely dry) conditions, has poor biodiversity with depleting tree cover, leading to landslides, avalanches, erosion and soil degradation. Use of inorganic fertilizers and pesticides has aggravated the situation. Extensive afforestation and resort to traditional methods of fertilizers and pesticides is a viable solution.
- The rainforests of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, the last of these kinds in the subcontinent, are in danger from the explorers hoping to discover oil reserves, with the forest officials standing in mute observation, helpless to do anything. Discovery of oil fields will lead to end of the rain forests which are four times more important than the normal forests.
- In an exemplary effort by an individual from Chennai a 27 year old tree was saved from being axed and relocated to the backyard of the plot in a six hour drama involving thorough study before accomplishing the task costing Rs. 4000.
- The senseless chopping of eucalyptus trees in Shalimar Bagh, Delhi was stopped by the forest dept. after the residents protested. The residents had asked for pruning of the trees and not head backing. This led to obvious protests and enquiry ordered.
- The above mentioned numerous examples are reflecting that forests and trees are essential for the development of mankind. The devastation

caused in the name of development needs to be undone with extensive afforestation attempts and preservation of the existing cover. The people have become more alert to their necessity yet it would take some time before people stop exploiting the forest resources for personal or economic gains.

WWF-India as an ENVIS Centre/Node has been keeping a tab on the media activity on environment related issues and carries out analysis on different issues in media.

For further information contact:

G. Areendran
Head-ENVIS Centre/Node

Indira Gandhi Conservation Monitoring Centre
World Wide Fund for Nature-India

172-B, Lodi Estate, New Delhi - 110 003

Telephone : +91-011-51504791/51504794

Fax : +91-011-51504779/4795

E-mail: igcmc@wwfindia.net

Website : <http://www.wwfenvis.org> / www.wwfindia.org

