

Feature

Environment

Hanuman Langur: Facing the Threat of Extinction

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The hanuman langur prefers to live alongside human habitations. In Keshabpur they damage jackfruits, mangoes, guavas, sapodillas, papayas, golden apples, lichees, black berries, bananas. They also damage various cultivated crops and garden vegetables. Thus, they are the disliked by the villagers who try to drive them away. Hence, the life of the hanuman langur is endangered by human beings also.



lize these for feeding, shelter and roosting. Various fruit yielding trees, shrubs, bushes are also found scattered all over the home range of the langur troops of Keshabpur. But now-a-days, the villagers have begun to clear-up the vegetation to use as firewood and furniture. As a result, the langur population in this area

has been affected.

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the villagers who try to drive them away. Hence, the life of the hanuman langur is endangered by human beings also.

In addition, capturing, poaching, and killing are also threats to the survival of the langur. The above activities may be instrumental in driving the hanuman langur population of our country and take it to a



point of extinction within a few decades. Since, the hanuman langur is an integral part of our wildlife heritage and it demands such a small area for its habitation, effective conservation measures should be immediately taken.

However, to ensure the conservation of hanuman langur and other flora and fauna in the vicinity of Keshabpur, various measures need to be adopted in order to provide the information and to help ensure the continuing existence of langur's primate diversity:

- As a long term project for the survival and conservation of the hanuman langur considerable areas of Keshabpur should be declared a langur sanctuary and a buffer-zone should be effectively managed.
- A certain land area should be selected and purchased where suitable plants species can be planted in order to provide feeding, roosting, shelter and undisturbed breeding activities.
- The Department of Forest should work with the villagers to demarcate a forest boundary, within which felling of trees should be prohibited.
- The Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) Act, 1973 should be enforced inside the area to end illegal capturing, poaching and killing of hanuman langurs.
- A programme for the education about the environmental awareness among the public and publicity campaign should immediately be taken up in order to impress upon the local people since it is only hanuman langur species of Bangladesh that are surviving here.
- Research on ecology, status, distribution and behaviour of this langur population within the vicinity of Keshabpur needs to be undertaken.
- An adequate sustainable conservation strategy should be prepared immediately by the Department of Environment and Forest in order to protect the langur species.

A Difficult Choice: Tribes or Timber?

Sarawak's indigenous people are at loggerheads with logging companies. Leah Makabenta of Inter Press Service reports.

A signboard put up in defence of the forest by some 300 Penan men, women and children manning a blockade at Sungai Sebatu in Sarawak, East Malaysia, reads:

"This is a place for worshipping God who is the greatest of all. Because of this, we will always stay here, because these are burial sites, customary lands and our origin. We plead with you not to disturb this place at all times because, there are people here who are distressed."

As loggers move in on what used to be traditional lands of the indigenous people of Sarawak, natives who rely on the island's lush rainforests are up in arms.

And despite the Malaysian government's efforts to ap-

pease them by offering to teach them alternative means of livelihood, they are determined to keep whatever they can of their forest heritage.

Sometime in the next few years, according to less sanguine predictions, logging will come to end in the rainforests

of Malaysia because there will be little left to take. Sarawak is currently the world's top tropical timber exporter. But with the state's forests under siege from loggers — with more than 18 million cubic metres a year felled last year — the green group Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM-Friends of the Earth) says most of the forest in Sabah and Sarawak will be gone in less than a decade.

A concerned Sarawak State Government, in agreement with the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), has decided to scale back its log exports to 9.2 million cubic metres by 1994. And in mid-July, the neighbouring Borneo state of Sabah decided to stop log exports in the next three

only five per cent royalty from sale of the two commodities that come under federal jurisdiction.

But all taxes and revenues collected from timber go to the state government, thus encouraging log exports and logging.

Timber politics play such an important part in Sarawak's economy that its leaders can hardly be expected to place emphasis on forest protection and sustainable management of this valuable resource, explain activists and opposition politicians.

"Timber concessionary rights have become the much coveted prize for political office and power, engendering a vicious cycle of timber politics in Sarawak," says economics



professor Jomo Sundaram of the University of Malaya.

With vast areas of the state's interior opened up for logging, the lives and well-being of tribes like the Penan have been under threat, while a handful of timber tycoons, the political leaders of the component parties of the ruling coalition and their families benefit from timber wealth.

"Logging is development, not for reinvestment in the future of Sarawak. It is development of immense personal wealth of those politicians who hold the reins of power," Sarawak opposition MP Sim Kwang Yang told an environmental forum here last year.

But some state and federal politicians have defended logging in Sarawak by blaming shifting cultivation practised by native communities for deforestation.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has been quoted as saying that the Penans are largely responsible for destroying the forests because they move from place to place instead of staying in one area and managing the land properly.

Penan rights activists counter that shifting cultivation would only cause deforestation if there is severe population pressure and mushrooming of rural settlements. There is no such pressure and the population of the natives is so small, they say.

Presumably in line with Mahathir's idea that "the Penans need to live like human beings", service centres have been set up to "integrate" the nomadic Penans into Malaysian society, including introducing new eating habits and new methods of obtaining food.

But while the Sarawak state governments says it has spent at least US \$1.6 million to help the Penan, little seems to have been accomplished. Indeed, Abin says the much-publicised reserves, land set aside for Penan communities, are "mere lip service, nothing is being done on the ground".

A Straits Times newspaper article last year said, however, that the Penans have been reluctant and unwilling "to accept and appreciate the physical developments that are being brought to them".

Meanwhile, the widespread conflicts caused by logging activities have remained unresolved. According to a SAM report, plans are afoot to convert thousands of hectares of secondary forest to oil palm plantations where commercial timber is no longer viable.

Many of these are native customary lands, which means more communities may have reason to fear the loss of their lands.

Arrest and prosecution have not stopped the blockades of the tribal people who do not seem to mind going to jail. And when they return to their village, they receive a hero's welcome.

Says Sim: "The blockades are not criminal problems that can be handled by the police and the courts. The problem has political and social roots and only when action is taken to respect the human rights of these Penans, Kenyahs, Kayans, Kelabits and Ibans can the problem be solved."

"YOU regard the Ganga river as your Mother", Veer Bhadra Mishra tells people as he points to the decomposing rubbish in the water, "so why would you do this to your Mother?"

For although the river is holy, it is not always pure.

In Varanasi, one of the oldest cities in the world, ghats (steps) lead down from the many temples, shrines, large old houses and princely residences. And to the ghats come millions of people to bathe and defecate, to wash clothes, utensils and even buffaloes, to cremate their dead, to collect water for drinking, cooking and rituals, to offer garlands to Ganga the Goddess, or simply to walk, sit, commune and meditate.

This intense, ceaseless round of human activity combines with the indiscriminate discharge of raw sewage, agricultural wastes and industrial effluents to pose a health hazard for people who use the untreated waters.

In 1986 action was taken. The assassinated Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, came to Varanasi to inaugurate the Ganga Action Plan (GAP), heralded as a "people's programme."

The first big effort to systematically control and monitor pollution in the Ganga, the Action Plan is primarily concerned with the diversion and treatment of domestic urban sewage, which accounts for nearly three-quarters of the pollution load.

About Rs 430.5 million (US \$ 24 million) was allocated to Varanasi for the development of sewage pumping stations and treatment plants, low-cost sanitation and an electric crematorium. But for the 1.5 million people of this densely backed holy city, the changes remain essentially cosmetic.

Despite denials by the main implementing agency of the Plan, the Uttar Pradesh State Jal Nigam (Water and Sewerage Board — one of the largest public sector undertakings in Asia), wastewater continues to flow at popular bathing places such as Assi and Dashashwamedh ghats. The pumping stations are often out of action because of irregular electricity supplies, lack of spare parts and shortage of technical staff.

Similarly the electric crematorium, although cheaper and less energy-intensive than burning bodies on a wooden pyre, has not altogether prevented the practice of throwing unburnt corpses into the Ganga, whether for religiously sanctioned reasons or because the crematorium fee of Rs 50 is too steep for some people.

And as yet there is no incinerator for animal carcasses.

One problem with making pollution control work is the diversion of money through

Heralded as a "people's programme," a campaign to clean up India's holy Ganga river has run into difficulties — by failing to listen to people's views.

by Sara Ahmed

corruption and high administrative costs, as suggested by the air-conditioned offices, cars bearing GAP nameplates and frequent air-trips to Delhi and the state capital, Lucknow, to meet regional directors and local politicians. As one veteran social leader in Varanasi exclaimed: "Some GAP engineers are eating the money!"

Added another resident who has lived near the riverfront for 30 years: "We feel

Meanwhile, a largely inefficient and corrupt police force patrols the river-front to check that people do not throw rubbish or unburnt bodies into the Ganga.

But unlike salt, participation is not an ingredient that can simply be sprinkled on to enhance flavour. As Panna Lal Yadav, a local councillor puts it: "In my opinion, they [the GAP] forgot to include the people."

The Plan reflects poor top-

— which could challenge unreliable or unavailable official figures, is not disseminated either to public or to GAP agencies.

The foundation admits its limitations, pointing out that all its executive members have full-time jobs elsewhere and have not been able to channel the momentum raised at public events.

Moreover, the office-cum-information centre at the

Foundation headquarters is open only in the late evenings, which means that children and women, crucial to the objective of its Clean Ganga Campaign, are unable to visit unless accompanied by a male or older family member.

Nevertheless, cultural extravaganzas which have made the organisation something of an international showpiece, continue to be held. Participation is equated with



Ganga plan: Steps in the right direction?

helpless. If Rs 20 million is allocated to a project, 60% is swallowed by the project executors and 40% may reach the project. That is why the GAP has had so little impact so far."

But the crux of the problem is the failure to give real meaning to a GAP buzzword: participation.

Because of the powerful popular cultural attachment to the Ganga, the government sees participation as the key to the programme — the means by which the scientific paraphernalia associated with pollution control will be accepted by the millions of Hindus for whom the Ganga is not "dirty".

Unfortunately, as in so many projects all over the world, the official approach to participation is more ceremonial than real. Placards along the ghats proclaim that to serve the Ganga is to serve the nation. A list of "don'ts" reminds the public not to use soap, wash clothes or defecate in the river without considering alternatives. Elaborate annual concerts, Ganga Mahotsavs, are held at the main bathing ghats where leaflets bearing similar messages are distributed. After the monsoons, national student social service camps are organised to clean the silt-covered steps of the ghats.

to-bottom communication, and is acceptable to the powers-that-be precisely because it does not challenge the existing institutional order.

The few non-government organisations in Varanasi perform little better. They lack the money and skills to sustain action, and their focus on cultural and religious perceptions of the Ganga, as a means of encouraging participation, overlooks social, economic and political realities.

Every year, for example, the Foundation set up by Veer Bhadra Mishra, a hydraulic engineering professor at Banaras Hindu University and hereditary head of a temple in the city, organises a children's painting competition on the theme of water pollution, and folk music concerts where poems and songs in praise of the Ganga are interspersed with environmental messages.

Environmental education is one of the Foundation's two basic objectives, but although the education of children is important in raising awareness, putting the emphasis on elite schools in Varanasi excludes the victims of environmental destruction who do not have access to formal classrooms.

Similarly, water quality analysis — its second objective

Getting the Most Out of the Sun

by D L Mallick

ENVIRONMENTALLY harmful impact of using energies like oil, gas, coal is a very well known to us. The time has come to explore venues for using energy like sun which is environmentally sound and this is not a mere imagination but a reality that has been materialised through the use of solar energy. For the conservation of nature and protection of the earth, for the sustainable and healthy development of the human society, misuse of ground energy is to be reduced with the alternative use of sun — a boundless source of energy. The sun gives energy from outside causing no loss to us, moreover, this is renewable source of energy. We can use solar energy and reserve it as much as we need which will certainly reduce the prevailing energy crisis throughout the world.

We are facing energy crisis both in the developing and developed world but in reality there shouldn't be energy crisis. The real crisis exists in invention and transfer of technology as well as use of technology. We need technology for renewing and reserving energy. We have

to develop a system of renewable technology in line with the production system.

We have to think whether we can afford the cost of the energy we use, or misuse. Its direct cost as well other costs and its application should be well evaluated. Most of the world's remotest areas do not have power like electricity and gas but they use fossil oil, coal and wood. Thus, they are damaging the natural reserves. We can never reproduce these things. Then, we have to seriously think about renewable technology which is to be incorporated with the production system of a society.

Solar Plant (one kind of metal pan) is one of the renewable technology. It is a hydro-electric system which takes energy from sun and reserve it for week or long. Moreover, this is environmentally sound and sustainable. This is neither so complex nor too costly and people can be self-reliant with the power of sun. This is a very dynamic technology, it can be easily marketed. In most of the developed countries, solar

energy is used to run the mills, factories and transports. Roofs of many houses meet the needs of household consumption such as energy for lighting and cooking.

In Bangladesh, some non-governmental organisations (for instance Nizera Kari), private organisation and autonomous bodies are preparing these solar plants.

However, their effort is not so sufficient to popularise these to the mass. We lack some instruments which are costly but very essential to construct solar plants. This may be one of the main barriers towards the benevolent use of this dynamic technology in our society. Then, the question comes of innovating local and adapted foreign technology that can be useful and cost-effective in our country too.

Technology transfer relates to the cultural process of a society, people are to be educated well to use a new thing and make the best use of it. Awareness is to be built as well as a new cultural goal is to be fixed for getting used to such a new technology.