

Same old story at Tangail Sal forest

Plundering of trees, seizure of woods go on

MIRZA SHAKIL, TANGAIL

The traditional Sal forest in Tangail is disappearing fast due to non-stop felling of trees and encroachment of forestlands.

Forest department officials claimed that they could not take prompt action against the looting of trees and the encroachment of forestlands due to a shortage of manpower and other logistical support.

The foresters seized a truck loaded with Sal trees at Ovirampur area under Bashtoil union in Mirzapur upazila on the April 20, a Saturday.

Just two days before on a Thursday, they seized another truck loaded with Sal trees from Patharghata area in the same upazila.

Though the trucks with trees were confiscated, the thieves managed to escape arrest, said Fazlul Haque, Range Officer of Bashotoil.

The trees in question were felled from adjacent Sakhipur forest, he added.

On March 19, a group of thieves cut down trees at Botchtol area in Sadar Beat of Madhupur upazila. When informed, a group of forest guards rushed to the spot and tried to stop them.

The thieves, however, launched an attack on the forest guards with sharp weapons, leaving six of them seriously injured, Sadar Range Officer, Khasru Alam, said.

Earlier on November 30, some 1,650 Sal trees on nearly 15 acres of land at Chandpur, under Aronkhola Mouja of the same range, were cut down in a single day, foresters said.

Some people from adjacent villages in Mymensingh's Muktagachha upazila took part in the massive destruction of the natural forest while the foresters could only watch, owing to the looters' large numbers and presence of women and children among them, they added.

Somnath Lahiri, senior research officer of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), said the trees are being cut down at different areas in the forest regularly with truckloads leaving almost every night.

The forest lands are encroached after cutting down the trees. Later, pineapple, banana, papaya, turmeric etc are cultivated on it, he said.

"I have been working at different



A truck loaded with illegally-felled Sal trees seized in Mirzapur forest, Tangail. Though such trucks are seized by forest department officials on a regular basis, the thieves usually manage to escape.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

levels and stages to preserve the Sal forest from 2004 but have not seen such massive destruction before. If such destruction goes on, the traditional Sal forest will only be found in history," he said.

Somnath also said chopping down trees had totally stopped in Madhupur upazila after the forest department started implementing a project titled "Revegetation of Madhupur Forest through Rehabilitation of Forest Dependent Local Ethnic Communities" in 2010.

Under the project, 700 locals, believed to have been involved in cutting down trees, were trained to save the

forest as community forest workers (CFWs).

Identity cards, uniforms, boots, a weekly allowance of Tk 300 and several other facilities were provided for them.

Felling of trees and grabbing of forestlands, however, resumed just after the Tk 22 crore-project ended in December 2015 and many of the trained CFWs started stealing trees and grabbing forestlands again, Somnath said.

Termining the leasing of forestlands in name of social afforestation a big reason behind destruction of natural forest, the green activist demanded a stop to it. He also emphasised the need to

save the Sal forest.

Earlier, the forests in Tangail were spread over 1,22,876 acres of land in five upazilas, 45,565 acres of which were in Madhupur; 47,220 acres in Sakhipur; 21,855 acres in Ghatail; 7,576 acres in Mirzapur, and 669 acres were in Kalihati, forest department sources said.

Of the total forests in the district 55,476 acres are reserve forests with 38,232 acres in Sakhipur; 7,225 acres in Mirzapur; 7251 acres in Ghatail; 2,500 acres in Madhupur; and 185 acres in Kalihati.

Almost two-third of the forests in Tangail, amounting to around 80,000 acres, have already disappeared due to

mindless cutting of trees.

Around 60,000 acres of forestlands in the district remain grabbed by influential encroachers, of which around 22,000 acres are in Madhupur, 19,500 acres in Sakhipur, 13,000 acres in Ghatail, 3,300 acres in Mirzapur and 150 acres in Kalihati, the sources added.

Contacted, Masud Rana, divisional forest officer in Tangail, said it is not possible to save the forest with such a short number of workers and logistical support.

Moreover, the law enforcement agencies did not provide sufficient assistance to the forest department in this regard, he added.

Solar smile for farmers



Many farmers have adopted cost-effective ways of farming. Solar driven irrigation systems is one such method.

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on power supply grids.

Experts say electricity is the key to economic growth and development for a country like Bangladesh. And to reduce the burden on the national grid, the country needs to develop solar energy to meet the demand for fuel without affecting the environment.

"The use of solar energy in irrigation has a good prospect in Bangladesh," said Siddique Zobair, member of Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA). "It [use of solar panel] is reducing the use of diesel and it is good for the environment."

"Solar driven irrigation models are usually run by experts and as a result, use of water for producing per kg of paddy is relatively lesser than other irrigation systems," he said.

Siddique said during the Boro season, the demand for water is high and solar irrigation could be of great help. He, however, said irrigation driven by electricity is cost effective compared to solar panels.

The SREDA member, however, said the country, like elsewhere in the

world, has to go for renewable energy and better energy management.

According to the official data, Bangladesh's capacity of power generation is around 15,000MW, and generation is some 9000MW, while the target is 20,000MW by 2020 and 40,000MW by 2030.

Of the amount produced now, renewable energy contributes around 1.5 percent though the government has a target of producing 10 percent electricity from renewable energy by 2020, Siddique said.

However, imposition of 10 percent duty on solar panel, as proposed in the budget for FY 2017-18, may strike a blow to the plan, he said.

"If the duty comes into effect, our efforts will face troubles. We have to renegotiate all the contacts we have signed so far. Price of solar panel-driven electricity will increase too," he said.

Abdul Matin, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, an environment rights group, found the use of solar panel in irrigation "a very good initiative."

"Solar energy is a dream for

Bangladesh ... It is good for the environment too," he said. Matin, however,

said there should be system for dumping batteries of solar panels, so that the environment was not harmed.

Solar energy-based irrigation project started in Bangladesh in 2010 and Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (IDCOL), a non-bank financial institution, bankrolls renewable energy projects.

IDCOL has so far installed 613 solar irrigation pumps and it has plans to install another 400 to 500 ones within this year, Md Enamul Karim Pavel, head of renewable energy of IDCOL, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Demand for solar irrigation pumps is increasing day by day and we have plans to set up more than 1500 pumps within 2018," he said. Pavel, however, said imposition of import duty may create problem.

"The programme is intended to provide irrigation facility to those who run pumps with diesel and thereby reduce dependency on fossil fuel," he said adding that the World Bank and several other organisations were supporting the initiative.

Advertorial

The Importance of Sustainable Consumption and Production in Bangladesh

By Mikel Perez Maiz

Consumption is the process by which goods and services are put to final use by people. Consumption is at the end of the line of economic activities that starts with an evaluation of available resources and proceeds through production of goods and services among people. The effect of this consumption, including depletion of resources and generation of waste as well as enhancement of human survival and flourishing, determines the resource base for the next round of economic activities. Taking this into account, what can Bangladesh do to grow without compromising future generations?

Last 3 years ECOLEBAN, a Project funded by European Commission (under SwitchAsia Program), has been aiming at enhancing the resource efficiency and sustainability of the leather sector in Bangladesh throughout the whole value chain of the leather related products such as, leather, footwear and other leather goods

The leather industry is a fast growing and vital component of Bangladesh economy, being the second highest foreign exchange earners after readymade garments. The industry is export orientated with Europe, America and some Asian countries being the main export markets. However, the leather sector is very polluting and causes harmful impacts both on the environment and human health.

That's why European Commission, through ECOLEBAN Project, among other EU Switch-Asia Projects, are trying to implement in Bangladesh a Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) practice both in industries as well as at all levels of the society.

SCP aims at "doing more and better with less," increasing net welfare gains from economic activities by reducing resource use, degradation and pollution along the whole lifecycle, while increasing quality of life. It involves different stakeholders, but the only effective way for production to change its values and practices is under consumer demand, as is already happening in North America and Europe, although some Asian countries have already taken more than considerable path in this regard (S. Korea, Japan, China and Philippines for example).

Funded By switchasia



Paving the way towards sustainability

One of the clearest examples nowadays to explain the success of SCP is the increasingly common existence of sustainable products. Eco labeled products can help the countries to make their manufacturing sector green and offer its consumers a wider range of environmentally friendly products and services.

In this regard, one of the most important initiatives that have been implemented by ECOLEBAN Project is the design and development of a leather footwear ecolabel standard (ECOLEBAN Footwear), providing consumers with adequate information on its benefits and promoting its opportunities within the leather sector.

Eco-labeling has a number of major benefits and those are the result of public awareness of wanting to be part of a more sustainable world, promoting the consumption of products that respect the environment.

With all this, although our contribution may seem not so big, the power we (consumers) have is much greater than we suspect, as can be seen from the constant appearance and disappearance of products and market references due to their low demand. It is the moment of Bangladeshi consumers to exercise the right to be informed and responsible consumers, seeking that the claims of the products / services we acquire are backed by reliable and verifiable systems.

Implementing Partners:



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