



REFOREST the world



"Bella". So was the bright green parakeet called at grandmother's residence in Sylhet. I remember spending hours with her as she pecked on some grain from the tiny bowl, carefully placed on a minute pedestal. Mesmerised by her bright feathers, I used to wonder why she never flew in the open sky like the other birds. Mother later told me that Bella had a limb injury that deterred her from flying and she was rescued by grandmother as a hatchling. Nevertheless, perhaps a neon-green, tweeting bird shaped my opinion lastingly, towards a more inclusive world for all living beings. A world where we live and let live.

But that was just the story of Bella...

There were so many others, like Bablu, the fluffy Terrier of the next door neighbour; Goltu, the friendly Scottish Fold that played with woolen strings all day long and even Orangy, the pet Japanese Macaque of a best friend.

These were all a part of growing up and they taught me how to respect and love other living beings equally as I would any other human life.

But the real story is slightly different. No matter how much we hope there would be friendship between the species, there's almost always some sort of conflict between man and animals, and it always begins with deforestation and a loss of habitat.

Somebody once told me that in order to comprehend the reality of habitat loss, I must fly over a tropical country. She also told me that if I did, I'd notice how a wide belt of rainforest that once circled the earth had been replaced by expanding cities, dams and logging... that I wouldn't need any references, just a view into the bareness would strike the reality chord.

The particulars are nonetheless scarier; according to a report by the World Bank; between 1990 and 2016, the world lost a frightening 1.3 million square kilometer of

forests, an area larger than South Africa, just by felling trees.

And experts seem to be concerned about so many other things, terming carbon dioxide emission as the least of our concerns, as forests do tenfold more than just clean carbon.

Forests provide habitation to eighty percent of the world's plants, birds and animals, help maintain biodiversity, protect against greenhouse gases by preventing them from entering the atmosphere and causing global warming, climate change and major natural disasters.

You think it stops somewhere here? No. Not really!

There are thousands of negative effects of deforestation that we are unable to comprehend as yet.

So, what is the solution?

Experts also say everything is not as grim as it looks. There is also good news, because of the extreme deterioration in the climate, 185 countries of the world formally pledged till date at the Paris Summit 2015 ratification, to reduce emission and keep temperature rises to well below 2 degree Celsius with the help of reduction of tropical deforestation.

But, what about the loss that has already occurred?

A UN backed mechanism called REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) has been initiated that involves the protection of forests and its inhabitants, where first world countries like Germany, Norway and UK have together pledged up to one billion dollars till 2020, to set up forestation efforts.

Indonesia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Peru and Colombia have signed the New York Declaration on Forests, aiming to halve the rate of deforestation by 2020 and diminish it by 2030. The total area of land proposed for restoration is described as covering "an area larger

than India."

And there are also men like Jadav Payeng who transformed an entire deserted area in India into a lush forest ecosystem by planting trees — all by himself!

I believe deep in my heart that the world will be a better place for our children, yet, I recount an unfortunate but revealing experience. This takes me back to Sylhet again, and this time my nephew plays in the same courtyard where I used to. A group of screeching monkeys come and ambush him; one angrier than the rest, snatches a packet of crisps out of his hand, after frivolously scraping his face.

As we ran to protect the child, shouting curses and screaming in disbelief, I go through a moment of suspended reverie, realising that these monkeys only became fierce because of us; they lost their habitat to mankind and capitalism!

Is this a world we want our children to witness? Or should my childhood years be the ideal?

It's for us to decide, and act on, before it's too late.

By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury
Photo: Nasira B. Mansoor

Disclaimer: No animal was hurt or treated in a cruel manner during the shooting of the photos used in today's feature. The Daily Star adheres to the provisions of the Cruelty to Animals Act, 1920 and pledges its support for the animal rights under the applicable laws and legal instruments.

Source: The facts in the story have been taken from the following online sites;
<http://www.fao.org/redd/en/>
<https://unfccc.int/process/the-paris-agreement/status-of-ratification>
<https://news.mongabay.com/2018/12/cop24-tropical-deforestation-risks-undermining-1-5-degree-warming-limit/>