

On days when the weather is favourable, when the sun shines bright and the clouds float along like marshmallows, the scene surrounding the Shah Amanat Bridge becomes a wondrous sight to behold.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



On a mission to save endangered trees

BJOYA BHATTACHARJEE

Native medicinal trees were once abundant in the country. But with the passage of time, they have either vanished or are on the verge of extinction, mainly due to indiscriminate deforestation.

For example, Kannaryi, Boilam, Civit, Rakto Chandan, Bon Sonalu, Olot Kambal and Udal aren't found anywhere in the country anymore. Meanwhile, medicinal trees like Haritaki, Raktan, Sundari, Arjun and trees bearing good timber like Dholi batna, Dholliya Garjan, Gamari, Sada Koroi, Malakanna Koroi are on the verge of extinction.

The Encyclopedia of Flora & Fauna of Bangladesh categorises 486 species as threatened, with the number increasing with time.

To address this, an initiative has been taken up on Chittagong University campus, which aims to revive these disappearing trees.

Dr Mohammad Kamal Hossain, a professor of Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science at CU, took the initiative back in 2019. With three years, results have started to flow in.

Dr Kamal told The Daily Star that the idea came to him suddenly. As he took his

students to a nearby forest for a practical class in 2005, he found that most of the medicinal trees that stood proud during his student life in the 1970s were nowhere to be found.

"They were all cut down. I felt so guilty that I thought I should do something for the survival of these species," he said.

Since then, he started planting trees inside the campus, albeit in an unorganised way. "It went on like this for the next 14 years as I couldn't manage money needed to nurse

From here, seedlings are sent out to be planted in Protected Areas (PA) of the country. Around 8,200 seedlings were distributed from here to different organisations.

Dr Kamal spoke to this correspondent about the importance of these trees. "These trees are key structural components of forest ecosystems. They also support a number of algae, lichens, mosses, ferns, orchids, parasites, climbers, insects, birds and other wildlife."



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But 2019 proved to be a breakthrough year. "Between 2019 and 2021, I took up a bold initiative and planted 3,169 saplings of native trees with the assistance of BARC between 2019 and 2021."

"Of them, there's 90 saplings of endangered tree species, including Raktakambal, Chakua Koroi, Boilam, Khudijam, Boddhiraj, Agar, Barta, Deophal, Dewa and Latkon," Dr Kamal said, adding that the seeds were collected from different areas of the country.

In addition, to preserve the trees, Dr Kamal also set up a seed archive at the forestry department, which stores seeds of around 350 species.

"Afforestation is one of the key tools for forest landscape restoration. Planned afforestation is now the demand of the time," he said.

Samarshwar Sinha, an master's student of Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science, said, "Dr Kamal loves the trees like his children. He inquires about the trees and provides several instructions to us regarding their nursing."

Jarin Akhter, director of Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science, said, "Dr Kamal is a true blue nature lover. The Institute is greatly benefitted from the initiative. The welfare of the country also lies in this initiative."

'I walk 3km daily to fetch water'

SIFAYET ULLAH

Sagarika Tripura, a resident of Alutila Rehabilitation Center area in Khagrachhari's Matiranga upazila, starts her day at 5:00am. With no source of water near her home, the 45-year-old has to make a 3-km trek through hilly terrains every day.

"I have to walk half an hour to collect water and need the same time to return home," said Sagarika.

Water used to be available in springs and streams near her home. However, the sources have dried up for the season.

The picture is similar in nine other upazilas of Khagrachhari. More than half of the population collect water from natural sources, and they face a severe water crisis during the dry season every year. During a recent visit to Alutila, this correspondent found that women and girls were collecting water for both drinking and household use from wells.

Adinath Tripura, a resident of the rehabilitation centre area, said people now depend on surface water sources – such as waterfalls, springs and streams – which are unsafe for drinking.

"Many people often suffer from water-borne diseases due to lack of safe drinking water," said Adinath.

According to Khagrachhari's public health department, the number of deep tube-wells and pressed tube-wells in the district is more than 10,000. It is possible to supply water to 70 percent of the district's population.

The country's three hilly districts – Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari – have long been experiencing a drinking water crisis, particularly during the dry season. Groundwater cannot be lifted through tube-wells in many areas.

"We tried several times to set up a tube-well near Alutila Rehabilitation Center area. But we could not find water, even after digging 1,200 feet," said Ayub Ali Ansari, assistant engineer of the department. "We are trying to initiate a project for people in the hills soon," he added.



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Dr Mohammad Kamal Hossain, professor of Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science at CU.



CVASU VETERINARY HOSPITAL

Treating animals with care

With a tensed face, Ghagra Bazar resident Babul Chakma stood with his puppy "Brownie" at the campus of Chittagong Veterinary and Animal Science University (CVASU) on Sunday.

SIFAYET ULLAH

The Rangamati native's anxiety was growing as he could not understand what had happened to his beloved dog – it was howling nonstop.

A doctor soon came in, examined the puppy, and prescribed some medicines.

"I treated my puppy in Rangamati but the she didn't recover. So I brought her here for better treatment," said Babul. "I have heard they have experienced veterinarians here. Hopefully, with their service, my puppy will get better," he added.

The Sahedul Alam Quadery Teaching Veterinary Hospital (SAQTVH) of CVASU is visited by many like Babul, from all over the country, for treatment of their pets suffering from complex diseases.

Located at Khulshi's Zakir Hossain Road the hospital sees around 100 to 150 patients every



day, according to authorities.

While visiting the hospital on Sunday morning, this correspondent saw pet parents gathering with their dogs, cats, rabbits and birds. Many also came in with cows, calves,



sheep and goats. Some had injuries, some suffered from loss of appetite, while others needed surgery and sterilisation.

The SAQTVH has eight different departments, including large animal, small

animal, poultry, gynaecology and surgery.

Besides serving animals, the mobile clinic is an important part of CVASU where students can gather practical knowledge.

Moreover, the hospital also provides its service in exchange for only a nominal registration fee, making it widely accessible.

The hospital usually remains open from 9:00am to 4:00pm during working days, with doctors serving in two shifts, said Dr Md Rayhan Faruque, director of SAQTVH. Three doctors serve in each shift, he added.

Besides, the hospital also has doctors who attend to emergency phone calls.

"We treat animals the same way we would treat people. Every day, we treat animals from all over the country," Faruque said.

According to hospital data, 4,606 animals were treated at the hospital in 2015, which increased to 7,022 animals in 2017.