

'Deforestation causing ecological havoc'

Newstoday

Visakhapatnam: The massive destruction caused by the recent Godavari floods was mainly due to the large-scale felling of trees in the area, Mr Chandi Prasad Bhatt, noted 'Chipko' movement leader and member of the National Wasteland Development Board, said here on Wednesday.

Mr Bhatt who toured East Godavari, West Godavari, Khammam and Visakhapatnam districts to study the various factors that contributed to the Godavari flood havoc in 1986, told newsmen that nearly 1000 hectares of forest was being destroyed every year in East Godavari alone. During the last 10 years, about 12,000 hectares of land was denuded of forests in the district, he said.

Mr Bhatt said he observed large-scale erosion of soil and major landslides at Rampachodavaram, Naredumilli, Pulusgondi and other watershed areas. Faulty road planning had resulted in the cutting of trees in sensitive areas, he said. Mr Bhatt said that felling of trees for commercial purposes should be completely stopped to preserve the natural forest which was the main source of sustenance for tribals. Natural forest contains run-off water and prevents soil erosion better than the large plantation of eucalyptus and other varieties being raised by the forest department. Growing an alien breed in place of the natural forest was not in the interest of

ecology and it would never replace the natural forest as a source of living for people, he said.

Environmental awareness was more in Andhra Pradesh compared to many other places, Mr Bhatt said. He appreciated the government for ordering the issue of tree pattas, which would confer on the people the right to enjoy the produce of the tree. This way, trees would be protected while providing a source of income to the people who depend on forest, he said.

Referring to the podu form of cultivation prevalent in tribal areas, Mr Bhatt said that the tribals cleared forests to grow foodgrains as it was a matter of survival. If the tribals' source of income were strengthened, podu would end naturally, he said. To a query on how to meet the timber requirements if cutting of trees was completely stopped, Mr Bhatt said that the forests should be developed in wastelands without touching the natural ones. The Wasteland Development Board was striving to this end through non-governmental organisations and the Integrated Tribal Development agencies. However, the programme needed involvement of people, he said.

The Chipko movement which successfully stopped commercial felling of trees in the Himalayan region would share its experience with similar movements elsewhere in the country, Mr Bhatt said and added

that the motivation should come from people and that the local groups must respond to the specific problems of their region.

1.3 m hectares of forest lost annually

India is losing 1.3 million hectares of forest every year, Mr Chandi Prasad Bhatt said here on Tuesday. Giving an audio-visual exposition on the Chipko Movement and environment of the Himalayas in the Andhra University Campus, he said the afforestation programmes of the government could compensate for only 12.5 per cent of the loss.

The forest development should be undertaken at village-level, Mr Bhatt said and added that the Chipko Movement had formed Dashohi Gram Swarajya Mandal (DGSM) to educate villagers on the importance of forests. So far the DGSM had planted one million trees, the survival rate of which was as high as 95 per cent. In the last three decades the heavy destruction of forests had not only caused great damage to the physical environment of the Himalays but also affected the daily life of villagers, Mr Bhatt said.

Stating as the main objective of Chipko Movement, restoration of people's rights on the nearby forests, Mr Bhatt said that the afforestation would be successful only when it was undertaken as a people's movement.