

Unabated felling of trees continues in Khalingduar



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Khalingduar Reserve Forest in Udalguri district has witnessed severe destruction of forests along with the presence of hundreds of wild elephants damaging paddy and houses of villagers. Although the matters have taken serious turn, forest department with just seven or eight people could neither chase away wild elephants nor stop smugglers involved in poaching or tree felling. According to eye witnesses large numbers of smugglers have regularly been entering Khalingduar RF (mostly since November 2012) and fell down more than hundred most valuable trees. Information says, all the smugglers used to enter into the forest at 5 am equipped with powered saws to move out in the afternoon with logs without any resistance. Badly effected areas like Sidabagan, Chariali, Western part (where wild elephant killed a forest person last year) etc are just one or half a KM away from the Nonai Range Office.

It needs mention that members of Green Valley Forest and Wildlife Protection Society (a local environmental NGO) have been guarding the reserve forest for last two years voluntarily, without any types of financial support. They had been a great help to forest department in checking poaching or tree felling. But none can offer free services ever. It so happened last month that members of the NGO had been busy with other tourism related activities in the district. Taking advantage of their absence smugglers or poachers immediately swung in to action felling as many as hundred valuable trees inside the RF. When contacted, H Kalita, Range Officer, Nonai Range said that due to insufficient forest forces it was difficult to guard a large reserve forest. According to him out of 18 working staff in the range, only 7-8 are engaged to guard the forest. He also added that all the 7-8 numbers of forest staff had been busy to chase away herds of wild elephants causing damage of houses and crops in several villages namely- Gejerkuchi, Dhopguri, Amguri, Gitibari, Paneri during November this year. The wild elephants have destroyed several houses and damaged paddy of nearly 500 bighas.

Forest officials, a few leading media persons and villagers with the help of 3 Kunki elephants tried to chase away such a herd on the night of December 1 at Gitibari near Paneri. But the elephants played a game of hide -&-seek. Forest officials tried to push back the elephants along the Nonoi river bed, but the clever animals made their ways through the tea gardens of Paneri. It is likely to create more trouble in the coming days.

Nature loving people of the district, environmental NGOs like Green Valley Forest and Wildlife Protection Society, Nonaipar; Green Society, Udalguri and media fraternity of the district urge the government immediately to rush more forest forces to the district; to deploy Army and SSB stationed in the district to check poaching and tree felling and to encourage members of the voluntary organizations working for the conservation of flora and fauna of Udalguri.

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BY JAYANTA KUMAR DAS

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