

**BEFORE THE NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI**

Original Application No. 555/2024

News item titled "India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000 Global Forest Watch" appearing in The Indian Express date 13.04.2024.

Date of hearing: 20.05.2024

**CORAM: HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE PRAKASH SHRIVASTAVA, CHAIRPERSON
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE ARUN KUMAR TYAGI, JUDICIAL MEMBER
HON'BLE DR. A. SENTHIL VEL, EXPERT MEMBER**

ORDER

1. This original application is registered *suo-motu* on the basis of the news item titled "India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000 Global Forest Watch" appearing in The Indian Express date 13.04.2024.

2. The matter relates to the loss of 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000 in India, equivalent to a six per cent decrease in tree cover during this period. The article cites the Global Forest Watch, which tracks forest changes in near real-time using satellite data and other sources. According to its data, the country lost 4,14,000 hectares of humid primary forest (4.1 per cent) from 2002 to 2023, making up 18 per cent of its total tree cover loss in the same period.

3. The news item further alleges that between 2001 and 2022, forests in India emitted 51 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent a year and removed 141 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent a year. This represents a net carbon sink of 89.9 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent a year. It states that an average of 51.0 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year was released into the atmosphere as a result

of tree cover loss in India. In total, 1.12 gigatons of carbon dioxide equivalent was emitted during this period.

4. The news item further elaborates that forests are both a sink and a source for carbon, removing carbon dioxide from the air when standing or regrowing and emitting it when cleared or degraded. Loss of forests, thus, accelerates climate change. Tree cover loss is not always deforestation, which typically refers to human-caused, permanent removal of natural forest cover. It includes both human-caused loss and natural disturbances. Examples of tree cover loss that may not meet the definition of deforestation include loss from logging, fire, disease or storm damage. The data showed that 95 per cent of the tree cover loss in India from 2013 to 2023 occurred within natural forests.

5. As per the article, The GFW data showed that five states accounted for 60 per cent of all tree cover loss between 2001 and 2023. Assam had the maximum tree cover loss at 324,000 hectares compared to an average of 66,600 hectares. Mizoram lost 312,000 hectares of tree cover, Arunachal Pradesh 262,000 hectares, Nagaland 259,000 hectares, and Manipur 240,000 hectares.

6. The news item quotes data from the Food and Agriculture Organization, which states that the rate of deforestation in India was 668,000 hectares per year between 2015 and 2020, the second highest worldwide.

7. The above matter indicates violation of the provisions of Forest Conservation Act, 1980, Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 and the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

8. The news item raises substantial issue relating to compliance of the environmental norms and implementation of the provisions of scheduled enactment.

9. Power of the Tribunal to take up the matter *suo-motu* has been recognized by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the matter of "*Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai vs. Ankita Sinha & Ors.*" reported in 2021 SCC Online SC 897.

10. Hence, we implead the following as respondents in the matter:

(i). Central Pollution Control Board, through its Member Secretary
Parivesh Bhawan, East Arjun Nagar, Delhi-110032

(ii). Ministry of Environment and Forest, through its Secretary,
Indira Paryavaran Bhawan, Jorbagh Road, New Delhi –
110003.

(iii). Survey of India, through its Director, Hathibarkala Estate,
Dehradun, PIN - 248 001,

11. Issue notice to the respondents for filing their response.

12. Respondent No. 3, Director, Survey of India will submit a report showing the position of forest cover in India with specific reference to northeast from the year 2000 onwards with each five year interval covering the period upto March, 2024. Let the report/response be filed at least one week before the next date of hearing.

13. List on 28.08.2024.

Prakash Shrivastava, CP

Arun Kumar Tyagi, JM

Dr. A. Senthil Vel, EM

May 20, 2024
OA No. 555/2024
HB