

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

Original Application No. 726/2024

News Item titled "Nearly 6 million trees disappeared from farmlands: study" appearing in The Hindu dated 18.05.2024

Date of hearing: 04.07.2024

**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 "Nearly 6 million trees disappeared from farmlands: study" appearing in The Hindu dated 18.05.2024.

2. The matter relates the loss of close to 5.8 million full-grown trees in agricultural lands in India from 2019 to 2022 as per a publication in the peer reviewed journal *Nature Sustainability*. As per the article, the states of Telangana, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, particularly the area around Indore experienced massive loss of trees and disappearance of mature farmlands. The tree loss estimate was on the "conservative" side and most of the losses were likely between 2018 and 2020. An approx. of 11% of such trees detected via satellite during 2010-2011 were no longer visible when reviewed from 2018 to 2022, leading the researchers to conclude that these trees had "disappeared."

3. The news item highlights that about 56% of India is covered by farmland and 22% by forest. With the largest agricultural area in the world, changes in tree cover here, while critical, have been largely "overlooked. According to the article, the researchers combined satellite-

imagery from two repositories – Rapid Eye and Planet Scope – to estimate changes in tree number from 2010 to 2022. Trees detected by Rapid Eye had an average crown size (the leafy outgrowth of tree) of 96 sq.m and such a high loss rate of mature trees over less than a decade is “unexpected”. The disappearance of mature farmland trees was observed in many areas, but numbers rarely exceed five to 10%, except for areas in central India, in particular in the States of Telangana and Maharashtra, where massive loss of large trees was observed. Here, several hotspot areas have lost up to 50% of their large farmland trees, with up to 22 trees per square kilometre disappearing. Smaller hotspot areas of loss are also observed, such as in eastern Madhya Pradesh around Indore.

4. The news item indicates violation of the provisions of the Environment Protection Act, 1986 and the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

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

6. 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.

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

- (i). Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Maharashtra
3rd Floor Van Bhavan Ramgiri Road
Civil Lines Nagpur 440 001
- (ii). Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Telangana
Telangana Forest Department,

Aranya Bhavan, Saifabad,
Hyderabad – 500004

- (iii). Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Madhya Pradesh
Office of A.P.C.C.F. (Wing-Information Technology),
Basement Floor Wing 'D', Satpura Bhawan, Bhopal- 462004
Phone No: (0755) 2674302
- (iv). Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change,
Through its Secretary
Indira Paryavaran Bhawan Jorbagh Road, New Delhi – 110
003

8. Let notice be issued to the above respondents.

9. Another O.A. No. 129/2024 involving the larger issue of encroachment in the country is under consideration before the Tribunal Hence, list this matter along with O.A. No129/2024 on 31.07.2024.

Prakash Shrivastava, CP

Arun Kumar Tyagi, JM

Dr. A. Senthil Vel, EM

July 04, 2024
O.A. No. 726/2024
HB