

The Tribune

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

GLADA clears encroachments on forest land, villagers protest

23 June 2021

Affected families of nearly 60 to 70 cultivators and population of Sekhowal village, forming part of the Mattewara Forest reserve, are up in arms over the move by GLADA in clearing alleged encroachments from the land officially handed over to it for the development of an industrial park.

While the GLADA officials justify their action saying that certain mischievous elements had encroached upon the land under the ownership of GLADA, the village population and affected cultivators said the government agency had acted in a high-handed manner by destroying the standing crops on the land under question.

Affected farmers and cultivators also allege that GLADA and the village panchayat had acted in a clandestine way in taking control of the forest land and evicting the cultivators without giving any notice, making proclamation and fulfilling promised conditions for compensation against relocation.

NGOs seek ban on axing of trees in state for a decade

Civil society organisations and citizens concerned across the state have joined hands to launch a public movement, 'Rukh Maroo, Manukh Maroo', (If trees die, mankind will die too) to demand a complete ban on axing of trees for 10 years in the state. The movement is spearheaded by the Naroa Punjab Manch and HC Arora, a lawyer of the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

Jaskirat Singh, member, Naroa Punjab Manch, said: "We have requested residents and NGOs across Ludhiana and the state to write emails to the Chief Minister to put a complete ban on axing of fully grown trees for at least next 10 years as green cover in the state is among the lowest in the country at 3.5 per cent, which is even below Rajasthan. People have realised during the pandemic how precious oxygen is. In the past few years, a lot of fully grown trees have been axed in the state either in the name of development or just to sell timber. Therefore, the drive has been launched."

He added: "There is an internationally accepted legal principle of intergenerational equity and not leaving natural environment in a good condition for our future generation is a serious crime under that. Hence, we are requesting the government for a complete ban on axing of trees further so that the green cover gets some time to heal itself."

Gurpreet Singh Chandbaja, convener of the manch, claimed that a large number of doctors, lawyers, engineers and businessmen were supporting the movement.

City-based environmentalist Harinder Kuckreja said the decision to set up an industrial park at Mattewara had come as a serious blow to the state and its people as the state was already going through the crises of incessant flow of untreated chemical waste into rivers. "Mattewara forest was the only reservoir of bio-diversity in the state," he added.

The president of the Council of Engineers, Kapil Arora, said: "We are trying to save trees both in forest and non-forest areas of the state. We have also approached the NGT in a number of cases and we hope the state government will also support this cause for the benefit of the state, its citizens and future generations."

Source: <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/ludhiana/glada-clears-encroachments-on-forest-land-villagers-protest-272621>