

Rapid deforestation causes man-elephant conflict - Daimari



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Jayanta Kumar Das 7 May 2010 11203 views

At a time when most of the forests of Udalguri district had been encroached by human settlement, destroying all the existing habitats and elephant corridors, including historic Samran elephant corridor on Indo-Bhutan international border, a few positive steps have been taken by Udalguri district administration headed by Deputy commissioner SS Meenakshi Sundarm and Bankim Sarma, DFO of Dhansiri Forest Division, Udalguri to end so called man-elephant conflict in the district. A district based awareness meeting on so called man-elephant conflict was arranged at Paneri forest office premises on May 5 with day long programme. Rihan Daimari, Minister PHE Assam; Santis Kunjur, EM, BTC; Mitha Ram Basumatari, EM, BTC; Kamali Basumatari, MLA, Paneri; Pradip Dimari, MCLA, BTC; PK Mahanta, ADC, Udalguri, Bankim Sarma, DFO, Udalguri and Dr. Anupam Sarma, coordinator, WWF Landscape Programme, Assam attended the meeting. Representatives of several organisations including Green Valley Forest and Wildlife Protection Society also attended the meeting besides several distinguished media persons and thousands of people.

Bankim Sarma, DFO, Udalguri in his welcome speech explained about the immediate need for taking measures to end the man-elephant conflict in the district causing deaths of 31 people by wild elephants during 2002 to 2009. He also said that the number of deaths were alarming in the sense that it also caused the deaths of more than 12 wild elephants during 2007 to 2009 either by electrocution and poisoning excluding two wild elephants which were seriously injured but treated by forest department. According to him 12 persons had been killed by wild elephants during the year 2009. Moreover 248 numbers of people had either been injured or lost their houses and property during the said period. According to him most of the people had been killed for venturing into forests for collecting firewood. In his inaugural speech Rihan Daimari, Minister PHE Assam remarked that rapid deforestation had caused the conflict not only in Udalguri but in other districts of Assam. He disclosed that government of Assam would soon implement a few new schemes for the restoration and conservation of existing forests areas including the elephant corridors. The Minister requested the people not to disturb the wild elephants by constructing electric fencing or by poisoning. He thanked DC and DFO of Udalguri for immediate arrangement of exgratia payment of Rs.40,000 each to the kith and kins of the killed people. He also said that IAY houses had also been provided to the victims.

Kamali Basumatari, MLA Paneri constituency also addressed the meeting saying that lack of food had compelled wild elephants to come down to villages (once belonged to them) in search of food. Dr. Anupam Sarma of WWF India while addressing the gathering informed about the role played by WWF. He assured that they would launch a few programmes in Udalguri district very soon for the restoration of man elephant relation. He said that until and unless forest areas were reserved for wild elephants, the conflict would continue. Mitha Ram Basumatari, EM, BTC also addressed the meeting.

The Minister and other VIPs distributed valuable local tree saplings along with the cheque of Rs.40,000 each to the kith and kins of 49 people killed. Moreover exgratia grant of Rs.2000 to Rs.5000 were also paid to 249 people. Depredated people of Udalguri have expressed happiness at the government arrangements and vowed to protect wild elephants in the coming days.

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BY JAYANTA KUMAR DAS

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