

Polyethylene-Free Malls, Reclaimed Forests, and St. Martin's Revival Mark Landmark Year for Environment Ministry

Over the past year, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has implemented a series of groundbreaking initiatives to protect the environment, conserve forests and biodiversity, and address the risks of climate change.

To curb pollution, the use of banned polythene in shopping malls across the country has been completely eliminated. Joint operations with law enforcement agencies are ongoing to prevent the use of polythene in manufacturing plants, kitchen markets, and other locations. As an alternative, a joint project with the Ministry of Textiles and Jute has been undertaken to ensure the affordable supply of jute bags.

In air pollution control, the National Air Quality Management Plan has been formulated, 830 illegal brick kilns have been demolished, and the process to declare Savar and Ashulia in Dhaka as "Degraded Airsheds" is underway. Illegal lead factories have been shut down, and youth have been engaged in awareness campaigns against noise pollution.

In Gazipur, connections from nine factories polluting the Gacha canal have been completely severed, and all polythene-producing factories have been closed. New programmes for the Department of Environment have been approved, along with initiatives to construct 37 of its own office buildings.

For hill conservation, the list of recorded hills from 16 districts has been entered into an online database, with

monitoring activities in progress. Under the Climate Change Trust Fund, 41 projects worth BDT 3.51 billion have been approved, and the Bangladesh Climate Development Partnership has been finalised.

In St. Martin's Island, the country's only coral-rich ecosystem, successful measures have been taken to regulate uncontrolled tourism, resulting in the revival of its natural habitats. Work is also underway to finalise a master plan for the island, along with waste management measures and alternative livelihood programmes for local residents.

Significant progress has been made in forest and wildlife conservation. A total of 10,322 acres of forest land allocated for various purposes in Cox's Bazar, Sonadia, and for Jafar Alam Cadet College have been reclaimed. In Purbachal, 144 acres have been declared as a special biodiversity area. Over the past year, 5,093 acres of encroached forest land have been recovered and reforested. The production and plantation of eucalyptus and acacia saplings have been banned, and special initiatives have been launched to restore the Madhupur Sal forest. Restoration work in Chunati and Sherpur forests is also underway to create elephant corridors and enhance biodiversity.

In wildlife conservation, 159 Elephant Response Teams (ERTs) have been formed to mitigate human-elephant conflict; initiatives have been taken to reintroduce the extinct native peacock; endangered species are being protected; wetlands have been declared as sanctuaries; and 293 wildlife crime control operations have rescued 5,684 animals. Plastic use and picnicking have been banned in national parks and eco-parks. Work is also ongoing to modernise the Wildlife Act and formulate new laws, rules, and guidelines.

These initiatives of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change have set a new benchmark for protecting the nation's environment and nature, making a significant

contribution towards building a climate-resilient and sustainable Bangladesh.