


## Forest Man of India urges people of Meghalaya to plant trees native to state

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### SHILLONG:

The 'Forest Man of India' Jadav Payeng has advised the people of Meghalaya to not bring trees from Assam, but to plant trees native to Meghalaya which will in a way preserve biodiversity.

Payeng, a native of Jorhat in Assam, was in the state to attend the 16th inaugural day of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Shillong on July 4 at the pristine location of Umsawli, where he also planted trees as part of the tree plantation drive within the campus.

Speaking to reporters, he said, "Development is essential but not at the cause of chopping trees and destroying nature. Development should be sustainable and must not affect nature. Humans are encroaching upon forest lands for constructing houses, offices etc.... however, my suggestion would be to make taller buildings rather than encroaching on land."

Payeng also suggested that the journalists of Meghalaya must open an NGO to create awareness on nature conservation as he observed that journalists have a responsibility to spread awareness about preserving nature and maintaining greenery.

He said, "Work together and make mother earth green. Without oxygen, how can you live? During COVID, those who died had less oxygen."

The Padma Shri awardee also attributed climate change in Meghalaya to rapid deforestation, which according to him has made the city warmer over the years.

Earlier, delivering a lecture, Payeng said that lessons on preserving nature should start from pre-nursery students.

He emphasized the importance of biodiversity and the need to educate young children about the significance of planting and nurturing trees. He envisioned children becoming ambassadors in the global movement to recreate a sustainable environment for a liveable planet Earth.

He urged the government to implement necessary measures to ban air rifles, thereby preventing the killing of birds.

Payeng highlighted that the Molai forest, which he initiated 42 years ago, currently serves as a home to 115 elephants, tigers, leopards, rhinoceros, and other wildlife. The forest attracts 80% of Indian migratory birds.

His dream project of connecting the Molai forest with Kaziranga National Park, a 60-kilometer stretch, is currently in progress, furthering the cause of conservation and biodiversity.

Payeng also advocated the planting of sandalwood trees for environmental and economic benefits.

Drawing examples from countries like China and Taiwan, he emphasized the need for India to increase its focus on cultivating sandalwood trees, known for their high value.

He urged India, with its rich biodiversity and favorable climatic conditions, to also embrace sandalwood plantation as a sustainable and economically viable initiative.

Stating that Payeng is a source of inspiration, IIM director D.P. Goyal said that every student of the institute will adopt a tree and after five years they can hand-over the plants to other students.

He urged all members of the IIM Shillong fraternity, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and stakeholders, to actively participate in and contribute to the plantation Drive.

He emphasized the importance of individuals' collective efforts in preserving and enhancing the environment for a sustainable future.