



The Sentinel

of this land, for its people

People join hands for the preservation of Behali Reserve Forest

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BISWANATH CHARIALI: People from different walks of life and various organizations — both regional and national — have joined hands to preserve Behali Reserve Forest. They have come forward to provide their suggestions and also to learn more about the forest.

So the friends for this forest conducted webinars, held art competition (entitled 'Artivism for Behali'), a twitter storm on August 1, besides many other activities to involve the masses. They have been sharing posters, flyers, messages in social media platforms.

The citizens' movement is demanding that Behali RF should be declared as a wildlife sanctuary.

Behali Reserve Forest, located in the foothills of Himalayas in the Biswanath district is one of the last such forests of Assam. The forest is known for its diverse habitats and unique wildlife. Though much of the diversity is yet to be known, more than 950 species have been documented so far. The forest is a part of the 'Sonitpur Elephant Reserve', and an important bird area as well as a key biodiversity area.

Nature's Bonyopran, the NGO associated with the monitoring of [Behali Reserve Forest](#) have been preparing their 20th memorandum, and hopes that this movement will help in upgrading the status of the forest. Since 1996, they have submitting 19 memorandums to the forest ministers, Divisional Forest Officers etc, but have not seen any results.

Hopes are very high this time, and with the active involvement of the different environmental NGOs, local youth (researchers, students, enthusiasts) as well as the media personnel (both print and electronic) Behali RF is gaining attraction now.

Assam has lost most of its forest till now, but the remaining ones are very important in conserving many hidden wonders. A handful of local scientists including Dipankar Borah, Parixit Kafley etc have jointly discovered three new plants for Science from the Behali Reserve Forest. Chlorophytum Assamicum, Aristolochia Assamica and Peliosanthes Macrophylla var Assamensis were discovered between 2019 and 2020. These are some of the rarest plants on earth, of which, two of them are only known from this forest.

In fact, this forest is also home to the Indian wild orange, Citrus indica — the progenitor to all the lemons, oranges, mandarins we consume today. It was believed to be extinct from [Assam](#), but Behali held a good population of it. Moreover, Galeola nudifolia, asaprophytic orchid, was newly recorded for Assam from this forest. Tupistra stoliczkana was rediscovered after a century from this forest. This signifies the importance of Behali Reserve Forest in terms of floral wealth and enriching the state treasure of Bioresources.

But a sudden change may be that the rampant encroachment or deforestation Behali faces, can wipe these rare plants from the whole Earth. Demands made so far, therefore, need to be addressed to declare this rich forest as a Wildlife Sanctuary and secure our State's treasure. It is high time that the people of Assam must understand the role of forests, which is the only way to solve most of the problems we face today.

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