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Former chief of women's panel booked for girdling 430 trees

Ambarish B

BENGALURU: For the first time, the Forest department has registered a case for girdling trees in an attempt to kill them. A case has been registered against former State Women's Commission chairperson Philomena Peris and others for girdling 430 trees in Balehonnur in Chikkamagaluru district.

Girdling is the removal of a strip of bark. The Institute of Wood Science and Technology (IWST) recently submitted a report to the Forest department stating that all the 430 trees died because of girdling and loss of food supply.

The Forest Department had first booked Forest Offence

Case in 1999 against Philomena for encroachment of deemed forest of 134.19 acres in Hadivoni village in Balehonnur. During the pendency of her appeal, 430 trees were girdled to destroy the 'deemed forest' environment. When the local forest officials visited the spot in May 2015, all the trees had died.

Following a request from the Forest Department, IWST conducted a field visit and submitted the report. The spot visit revealed that 430 jungle and reserve trees on the encroached deemed forest land were girdled with half-foot-one foot bark width.

A team of experts from IWST comprising Dr R Sundarraj (entomologist), Dr A Muthu Kumar (pathologist)



According to expert report the girdling was done up to 30-50 cm, between the upper and the lower cut.

and Lingappa (research assistant) conducted the field visit. The girdled trees include 276 Matti (*Terminalia Tomentosa*),

39 Hunalu (*Terminalia Paniculata*), 25 Nandi (*Lagerstromia lanceolata*) and 27 Taare (*terminalia Bellirica*).

"The girdling was done upto 30-50 cm, between the upper and the lower cut. Some trees were girdled at the top while others at the bottom. The sprouting of leaves below the girdling and dead branches above the spot indicates that the food supply was completely blocked," the report states. A senior Forest department official said the Range Forest Officer, Kalasa has been told to file a chargesheet, along with the report, for girdling of the trees with an intention to kill them only to destroy the deemed forest environment.

Philomena's family owns at least six coffee estates, Avanti,

Prashanti, Dwaraka, Jenukanu Estate, Manjappa Block and Balehonnur in and around Chikkamagaluru district. The Forest department had issued notice to Philomena and others to evict the forest land in 2000. The appeal filed by her was also dismissed by the Chief Conservator of Forests, Chikkamagaluru Circle in July 2014.

Philomena said that the Forest Department has no evidence to establish that she had done the girdling. "I had purchased this land from an individual in 1985. There were dried trees before I bought the land. The Forest Department is making false allegations," she said while admitting that she had purchased encroached land.

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