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Free up sandalwood trade, experts tell govt

Grow The Tree In Every Courtyard, Is Moily's Advice

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bangalore: Is there a crisis in Gandhada Gudi (temple of sandalwood) as Karnataka prides itself? Experts at an international seminar here on Wednesday believe there is.

They cited the increasing instances of smuggling of sandalwood and the sharp dip in its production to back their crisis theory. The seminar 'Sandalwood: Current Trends and Future Prospects' was organized by the Institute of Wood Science and Technology (IWST).

Where did things go wrong? "State ownership was a cause of concern. Despite opening it up for farmers to grow this commercially-profitable species, apart from forest lands since 2001, the prohibition on free trade has been a big area of concern," said HS Anantha Padmanabha, forestry consultant.

"The only tree in the world which is sold in kilograms, sandalwood in its natural habitat is always a plant. Before it grows into a tree, it is cut and



Syed Asif

EFFORTS LAUDED: RA Shrimathi (C), a retired scientist from the institute of Wood Science and Technology, was felicitated at the seminar on sandalwood, in Bangalore on Wednesday. The event discussed the sharp dip in the production of sandalwood

smuggled out. Farmers initially struggled to grow sandalwood over a height of 1 foot, but now they're cultivating it successfully. The problem lies with the state's policies," said V Ramakantha, director, IWST.

Significantly, the government of Karnataka retracted this monopolistic policy in 2001, and Tamil Nadu did so in 2002, liberalizing sandalwood cultivation and harvesting by indi-

vidual entrepreneurs and corporate bodies. Yet, they retained control at all levels. Farmers in Karnataka can sell their produce only to government agencies.

The experts hoped the Sandalwood Protection Bill, the draft of which was placed before the Centre in August 2012, will make a difference. They felt the rules must be farmer-friendly.

Earlier inaugurating the seminar

Don't mix politics, preservation

We are examining the Kasturirangan report. Do not mix politics with the preservation issue. The Western Ghats has to be preserved and forest preservation cannot be compromised, but at the same time we have to take into account the apprehensions of people from the six affected states. We cannot take away livelihood options of the locals there.

M Veerappa Moily on implementation of the Kasturirangan report; the minister didn't give any timeframe for implementation

Union minister for petroleum and natural gas, environment and forests M Veerappa Moily said he would write to the state chief minister to restore sandalwood's 'royal' status.

Sandalwood needs to be grown in every courtyard in Karnataka if it has to be revived, the minister said. "Sandalwood policies have been liberalized but still not taken up anywhere. We need to take a relook at the existing policies," said Moily.

He pointed out that in recent years, Kerala has been able to successfully arrest sandalwood smuggling and focus better