

**AN ENQUIRY REPORT
ON
DEPARTMENTAL OPERATION OF TIMBER**

- By -

September, 1988.

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FOREWORD.

The assignment of enquiring into the departmental operation as practiced in the State of Assam during the recent past was accepted by me on three, amongst others, agreed assumptions. They were :

1) Necessary transport facilities will be made available to me by the Government for visiting the different work centres and offices of the Divisional Forest Officers for study and varification of the records and conditions in the field.

2) At least one Assistant in the rank of Assistant Conservator of Forests or a senior experienced Forest Ranger will be provided for helping in collection of data and scrutinising the records. And

3) The department will extend full co-operation in making the records available as and when requested and will extend all necessary help in conducting the study.

Unfortunately, these did not prove true and the promised assistance never came forward. No assistant was made available at any stage. The requirement of a vehicle, except for the first two months or so had to be managed with begged and borrowed ones or by availing chances of other officers of the department going on tour, whom I could accompany by adjusting my programme accordingly. The want of a transport put serious constraints in conducting the enquiry as visits to work centres had to be drastically reduced. The co-operation at divisional level was understandably lacking. Many of the Divisional Officers failed to furnish basic information like what was the quantum of timber operated and the expenditure made on different items of work, the quantity of timber now lying at different depots waiting disposal, etc. even after requests were made from the level of the Chief Conservator of Forests and reminded more than once. The authenticity of the figures received from a few divisions, who cared to submit them was doubtful - a point discussed in detail at relevant place in the report. The enquiry, as such, had to be conducted within serious limitations and the report that followed is based on the information I could personally collect from the records and visits to few of the more important work centres.

I will fail in my duty if I do not put in record the help I received from the officers and the staff of the Chief Conservator of Forests (G) office at Guwahati, the Conservator of Forests posted at Jorhat and Kokrajhar without which it would have been impossible for me to complete the work. I have also received help and suggestions from various officers both in service and since retired, at personal level - I record my thanks and gratitude to them all.

I would also like to mention here that the department's working standard, specially so far as the maintenance of records are concerned needs a drastic and immediate overhaul and there is a lot of scope for improvement of the monitoring system in the working of the department.

Dated Guwahati,
the 20th Sept., '88.


(N. Goswami).

The enquiry to which this report relates is a sequel to the Recommendation NO.17 of part V of the Report of the One man enquiry Commission under the Chairmanship of Shri S.D.Phene, I.A.S. submitted to the Government of Assam on 24th April'1987. The recommendation ran as follows:-

"The Departmental forest operations were started for elimination of the malpractices of the private contractors. Unfortunately there are many reports that Departmentalisation of operations has also departmentalised these mal-practices, specially where the Departmental Operations and regulatory organisations are headed by the same persons. This may be examined in depth."

This recommendation was accepted by the Government and the undersigned was appointed vide the Government (Forest Department's) letter NO.FRS.188/87/6 dated 27.2.1988 to "enquire into the Departmental Operation of timbers and to suggest improvements and remedies as per recommendation NO.17 of the One Man Inquiry Committee."The initial term of appointment was for a period of three months which was subsequently extended by a further period of three months.

I took up the assignment with effect from the forenoon of the 14th March'1988 and as such, the term of the assignment expires on 13.9.1988. The Govt. order did not contain any specific terms of reference, as such, it was assumed that the enquiry was to be of a general nature, covering all aspects of Departmental Operation of timber, a fact which was confirmed by the Secy. to the Govt. of Assam, Forest Department, in an initial discussion the undersigned had, prior to taking up the assignment on 14.3.1988.

DEPARTMENTAL OPERATION : THE BACK GROUND INFORMATION.

In the Forest Departments all over the country, it is customary to harvest forest produce in two different recognised ways. The most wide spread practice used to be the one generally termed as the contractors' operation or operation through purchasers' agency. Under this system, the trees required to be cut and removed are marked & formed into coupes, which are then sold through competitive sales; through public auctions or by inviting tenders. The intending buyers are expected to offer a price for the entire produce of all the marked trees forming the coupe. The buyers are expected to operate

the trees within some specified period and remove the outturn from the forest area. They are also required to clear all dues prior to removal of the produce. Because of its inherent simplicity and because the system demands minimum involvement of the Department, financially or otherwise, in actual operation of the trees, this system enjoyed an universal preference not only in Assam but also in the country as a whole. Under this method of working, the Departments' responsibility was limited to the watch and ward duty of guarding against removal of trees not included in the sale and realisation of the offered value of the coupe before produce is actually removed.

The second method of timber operation, followed to a limited extent was, what is termed as "Departmental Operation" where the department directly invests in felling, sectioning and transport of the resultant produce to sale or storage depots. The disposal of the timber is then arranged as 'lots' through competitive sales. Departmental Operations, though has gained a lot of attention in the recent years, is definitely not a new concept introduced in Assam, or to that effect, anywhere in the country.

T.J.Campbell in his "Brief History of the Forest Department in Assam" (upto 1895-96) mentioned under Para 102:

"Two methods are adopted for working Assam Forests : (a) Departmental Operation and (b) Purchasers' operation. The first is confined to reserved forest areas or the collection of wood elsewhere. It is almost exclusively restricted to felling of large timber and stacking of the same in timber depots, for convenience of traders, the conversion into scantlings and Railway materials have been undertaken at various periods, but usually at a financial loss, whilst timber in the rough pays if the market is at all buoyant. Generally these operations are discouraged, as they occupy a disproportionate amount of supervision to the return received." Earlier in the book Campbell mentioned (Para 80) "Earliest opportunity was taken for commencing Departmental Operations, but the results from 1870 - 71 to 1872 - 73 were a loss of Rs.2,839/- the expenditure being Rs.5,727/- and receipts Rs.2,933/-. This was due to the working out of first class timber from Lakhimpur and Sibsagar" *****. He mentioned that the results of Departmental Operation within the period from 1874 to 1895 - 96 resulted in a profit of Rs.1,37,516 and the

Goalpara figures for 7 years, after making due allowances for contingencies showed that Departmental work realised about 50% more revenue per Cft. than obtained by selling standing trees. He then goes into some lengthy calculations, comments and explanations and finally arrives at a figure of 1.22% as the net return on the capital invested in the Departmental Operations. His remarks are" **** such operations are not sufficiently remunerative and only justifiable on the ground of either stimulating trade in timber or husbanding the timber required from the forests *****".

Prior to the present phase of complete departmentalisation of timber operation, timber to a limited extent was always extracted by the Department in most of the Divisions. These were mainly for the extraction of trees damaged by wind and other natural causes, trees felled by encroachers and other illegal operators and when some specific small area was needed to be cleared of trees for making the space available for nurseries, building sites roads and extraction paths.

Both these methods of Operating Forest areas have their inherent merits and demerits. The purchasers' operation system, as already

mentioned earlier, being simple and calling for no investment of men and money in actual operation process, ensures complete disposal of the trees. There is no fear of a part of the outturn of the trees, for the operation of which the Department has made some investments, remaining undisposed (or becoming undisposable because of decay set in during the period of operation) involving loss of revenue. In the purchasers' operation, the trees are sold in "as is where is" condition. It is the purchasers' responsibility to find out their worth before they offer their bids for the coupes. But precisely, for this very reason the buyers are always cautious and conservative in offering their bids for standing trees. There is always an area of uncertainty about the quality of the timber the trees will yield and the operational difficulties involved. The individual trees cannot be inspected by them and even if they do, the outward look may often prove to be deceptive. Buyers therefore, try to keep as large a factor of safety as the competition will permit in offering the bids for the coupes, thereby adversely affecting the revenue earnings of the Department. In the other extreme, if the expected competition is too high there is a tendency of offering speculative bids which the buyer's fail to pay

later, on actual working of the coupes. All types of pressure technics are resorted to, political or otherwise, to get additional trees allotted on the pretext of defective ones found, loss etc. in the coupes purchased; results, again a loss of revenue. Against this, when the trees are operated by the Department and the logs are graded to size, species and quality, before they are offered for sale in centralised depots, the factors of uncertainty are reduced to the minimum possible, the period of investment of capital by the contractors is considerably cut down; therefore, produce gives much higher returns.

Other short comings of the purchase^C_A's operation method are enumerated as follows:-

The contractors are guided by ' the principle of higher profit margin'. They are not interested in operating the produce not likely to give proper return even if they have paid for the trees. Coupes will always contain some poorer quality trees, removal of which is imperative on silvicultural grounds or for improving the sanitation of the forests. Operation of such trees sometime even give a negetive return to the buyer which

acts^{as} a strong disincentive for their operation. The net result is a wastage of scarce resource and adverse effect on forest sanitation.

2. Unscientific logging resulting in higher felling damage. The purchaser of the coupe is not concerned about the damages caused on the crop retained after trees marked for removal. On the other hand, there is an underlying tendency to damage a few unmarked trees in the process of felling the marked ones, because the system allows him to get the trees so damaged on payment of proportionate value, except in the rare occasion of some one taking the trouble of proving that the damage caused was 'will-full and avoidable'.

3. Exploitation of labourers engaged:- the labourers engaged in forest operations usually belonging to underprivileged classes living in and around the forest areas having very little venues of employment available to them are often forced to take up hazardous works at unremunerative wages by profit guided contractors.

4. Defaulting payments of instalments ~~of~~ adversely affecting the Department's earning schedules. Unsuccessful operation by contractors resulting in irrecoverable outstanding dues.

5. Unscrupulous contractors in collusion with equally unscrupulous employees of the Department, operates trees not marked for felling and take out the produce as outturn of permitted trees.

Against all these and many other shortcomings, the system has some recognised merits to keep in use for a century in Indian forestry. The details of the operational system is wellknown to the operators as well as the employees of the Department at all level. Many checks got built in the system against the known defects through the years of operation. Seperate officials are employed for seperate items of work - tree marking, piecemarking of logs, sale marking of the final outturn, coupe inspection etc., thereby making it possible to detect commission or omission of any act, intentionally or otherwise, by one man, by another. The contractor is agreement bound for all his actions and liable to be held responsible for any illegality detected within the area of his operation. The rules provide that the area of operation is to be properly inspected by a responsible officer of the Department at the end of the working period.

The National Commission of Agriculture, in its report published in 1976, included a recommendation to do away with the intermediaries in forest operations.

The recommendation was apparently based on the assumption that the country's forest areas were degraded and ruined by illegal operation by the middleman contractors in the guise of legal and authorised working of the same. This recommendation was approved by the Central Board of Forestry and accepted by the Central Government. Directives were issued to all states accordingly. This subject was discussed in various national forums and letters from the highest level in the centre were received by the States to expedite complete departmentalisation of all forest operations. Prior to Assam's introduction of Departmental Operation, several States of the country had already switched over to Departmental Operation either under direct departmental supervision or through Forest Development Corporations specially established for this purpose.

A meeting of all the senior forest officers of the State was called at Dispur on 17th and 18th Aug'1978 to discuss about introduction of Departmental Operation as one of the agenda items. This was addressed by the Chief Minister, the Minister, Forests, and senior officials of the Government. A decision was taken in the meeting to introduce Departmental Operation in Kachugaon Division

from that year itself. Necessary fund was earmarked and work was started from the fag end of the financial year. By the next year, about 60% of the expected outturn of the Kachugaon Division was extracted departmentally. The works were managed by meeting the need of additional manpower by borrowing few supervisory staff from other Divisions. The work was taken up mainly on a trial basis. The results of the operation showed that the department's net earnings (after the cost of operation was duly accounted for) increased by 215% of the otherwise expected amount, i.e. if the older system of operation through the purchasers' agency was continued. Justifiably encouraged by the results, the department proposed introduction of the system in the other two Goalpara North Bank Divisions, i.e. Haltugaon and Dhubri Divisions, from 1980-81 with an envisaged outlay of Rs.55.80 lakhs.

The Dubhasi Committee Recommendations:-

A Central Task Force on Agricultural Economy of Assam was appointed by the Union Ministry of Agriculture (Forests at the relevant time was a part of Agriculture Ministry) at the instance of the Prime Minister. The Task force was under the Chairmanship of Shri P.R. Dubhasi, Addl. Secy. to the Govt. of India in the Ministry of Agriculture and had a multidisciplinary composition. The Task force

visited Assam from 19th to 27th March'80, besides visiting various places in the State, had several rounds of discussions with the senior officials of the State. The Taskforce submitted its recommendations immediately there after. During its visit, the Taskforce had found that the Forest Department then possessed 9 Assistant Conservators of Forests, 21 Forest Rangers and 38 Foresters who were trained in various Logging training centres run by the Govt. of India. The departments proposal for departmentalisation of timber operation in the two divisions of Hailuagaon and Dhubri was awaiting sanction for want of necessary financial resources. The state's potential for introduction of departmental operation was duly recognised by the Task force and on its recommendations, the additional allocation of Rs.56.00 lakhs was made available within 1980 - 81. The Task force also recommended complete departmentalisation of timber operation in the entire State in a phased manner under a time bound schedule. By 1982-83 all the plains forest divisions of the State were brought under this system of operation.

The Works as Initially Planned:

When the work was first started in the Kachugaon Division with subsequent

expansion of the programme to include the Haltugaon and the Dhubri forests divisions, every aspect of the operation was duly considered and detailed procedure was laid down, not only the duties of the departmental staff at various level and their responsibilities were spelt out, the payment and accounting procedure to be followed and the various records and returns to be maintained etc. were also duly prescribed. A seminar was organised at Kachugaon where most of the senior forest officers pulled their knowledge and experience to standardise the forms and registers to be maintained in connection with the Departmental Operation.

Forest Department is one of the oldest (if not THE oldest) organised department of the country, manned exclusively by well trained personnel at all executive level. The department was proud of its tradition, its well documented working systems and procedures. The Forest Manuals and the forest department codes are comprehensive enough to include rules and procedures of all forest operations, activities and working. As such devising forms and registers to be maintained in connection with total departmentalisation of timber operations, at best involved minor modification of some relevant forms to suit

changed circumstances and new policy directives. The detailed procedure laid down in the initial planning of departmental operation in Kachugaon Division therefore, was only a re-enunciation of what was already provided. The Kachugaon Division envisaged the following "Duty distribution" at different levels.

1. At Divisional Forest Officers level.

i. To decide the areas of operation based on the working plan prescriptions - fixing the time schedule and sequence of activities and monitor progress of works.

ii. Arrange disposal by organising timely sales, arranging supply orders (eg. Railway supply).

iii. Expenditure control and realisation of revenue.

iv. Over all planning of the works, and maintaining coordination of works of different work units, take appropriate action for removal of constraint if faced.

2. At Assistant Conservator's level (Attached).

The Asstt. Conservator of Forests attached to divisional office will assist the D.F.O. in all the above mentioned works

besides timely and regular supervision/ inspection of all field operations including check measurements of some percent of the logs operated and varification of records in the field to ensure their correct maintenance.

3. At Range Officer(Logging Range) Level.

i.Preparation of plan of action for each coupe to be operated - arrange labourers, equipments and stores, camping gears including water supply arrangements before actual starting of the works.

ii.Arrange proper supervision of working - ensure sectioning of the trees to the optimum lengths for obtaining the best price. For this purpose, the Range Officer was expected to conduct market study and collect information from the regular timber traders.

iii.Arrange for getting the logs piece marked by regular and timely requisition of piece marking officers from the territorial Range concerned.

iv.To ensure issue of weekly work measurement slips to labourers and transport contractors engaged in the field and arrange

for regular and timely payments strictly on the basis of the work measurement slips only. All bulk payments, e.g. On road transport bills etc. were to be paid from the divisional office against bills prepared in prescribed forms, duly certified by the Range Officer and supported by work measurement slips and the receipted copy of the extraction challan duly signed by the Depot Officer.

The Depot Officer was to maintain a register in a prescribed format to keep record of receipt and disposal of all logs entering the depot.

The Depot Officer was required to submit a monthly/fortnightly progress report of receipt and disposal of logs in the depot in duplicate to the range office, a copy of which was to be forwarded by the Range Officer to the D.F.O.

A fortnightly progress report on the Departmental Timber Operation was also prescribed to be submitted by the R.O. to the D.F.O. This report was to be prepared coupe-wise.

The work of departmental working of the forests was initiated with this framework and the basic reason why the operation

in the initial period was very successful, which in turn prompted the department to its introduction in other divisions was because the rules were scrupulously followed at all levels, all records properly maintained and all checks properly exercised. It is however, to be placed in record that dedication of officers at divisional level and their personal involvement to make the venture a success, contributed significantly towards its success.

The ultimate success of Departmental Operation depend not on felling, logging and transport of the logs to the sale depot, but on ultimate disposal of the logs before they deteriorate, at a price which yields a higher revenue than otherwise obtainable. The initial plan of operation ensured quick and timely disposal of the outturn of the coupes by holding monthly sales either by open auction or under tender system. The materials that arrive at the sale depot within the month and any material that may be lying unsold in previous sale(s) could be put up for sale in the monthly sales. This was the practice followed by the Kachugaon Division as well as the two other Goalpara Divisions and as a result very little unsold material remained. The fact that the bulk of

the produce of Goalpara forests is of durable quality (mainly Sal) with a long self-life ^{also helped.} Delay in disposal of such material, within reasonable period of time does not adversely effect the price regimen - it may, in some cases, give a positive effect due to price escalation in the timber market. Whatever little non-durable timber came out of the forests of these divisions had also more or less earmarked consumers like WIMCO for the match wood and the plywood mill at Dhubri for the plywood material. Kachugaon's success is also partially attributable to the existing infrastructural set up of the division the transport network available inclusive of their Tramway system and the sawmill, which could convert the unsold logs to salable produce in the form of railway sleepers and scantlings; apart from the easy workability of the forests compared to those in the Upper Assam areas.

The Extended Operation:

By 1982 - 83, when Departmental Operation was extended to the evergreen forests of Upper Assam, the fact that the conditions there were drastically different, does not appear to have been taken into due consideration. The workability of the Upper Assam

forests, the end use of the material to be extracted, their quality, durability and expected shelf-life and above all the Government's commitment to make nearly 90% of the expected outturn of plywood species from these forests available to the existing and mushrooming plywood and veneer mills, at subsidised price make the situation entirely different from those prevailing in the basically Sal forests of Goalpara. The then Chief Conservator of Forests in proposing to extend departmental operation to the Upper Assam forests wrote (Correspondance in file NO.FA.39/81-82/T.O. - C.C.F's office File.) that instead of buying the plywood logs from the contractors working in the Upper Assam forests and then supplying them to the Millers, the forests will be operated directly by the Department. The budget provision available for purchasing the logs will cover the cost of operation not only of the plywood logs but the entire prescribed yield from the forests. It appears that at that time the department was concerned only about the fund requirement for the operation of the forests but a basic difference sought to be brought in and the possible effect there of, does not seem to have been taken into account. In the then prevailing system only the selected

logs were bought from the working contractors as per terms of agreements which made it obligatory for them to supply a specified quantity of plywood logs at prefixed prices, and the entire quantity so procured was given over to the millers. There was no question of part of the thus procured quantity of timber remaining with the Department as unsold material. The logs which are not selected by the department for procurement against the plywood quota remains the property of the coupe holder who had already paid for them as the coupe value. Non-procurement of a part of the cutturn from a coupe against plywood quota does not entail any loss to the Government. But under the changed circumstances when the forests are operated by the Department by investing Govt. fund, there is an investment on each log operated, apart from their intrinsic value as Government property. When the cream of the produce is selected as plywood logs to be supplied at a subsidised price what is left with the Department is only the much of inferior quality timber of quickly deteriorating species with poor marketability. The cost of extraction of the left over logs added to the royalty at rates of

comparable class of timber from the unclassified State Forests, (which is the basis at which the sale prices of the logs are fixed) makes their price too high compared to the rate at which good quality timber is made available by the Government. This appears to be the main reason why a large quantity of logs are lying undisposed and rotting in the depots all over the Upper Assam.

REVENUE AND FORESTS

Forests' contribution to the States' exchequer is too well known to need repetition. Forests has always been accepted as a primary source of revenue from the time Government took interest in its management in India in the mid-last century. Conservation was never given the due importance it deserved. The efficiency of a forest manager was judged not on how well he has been able to protect sustain and enhance the biological and environmental value of forests, but on what revenue he has been able to collect. On one hand there is a growing concern all over the country about the steady depletion of forest resources, on the other hand forests are managed only as a source of revenue and environmental aspects are sacrificed in favour of earning

revenue. The havoc wrought by this revenue oriented forest management practice has never been considered at any stage. Even in the instant case, the criterion of increasing the revenue seems to be the guiding factor in taking up Departmental Operation. At no stage, in any of the proposals the fact that Departmental Operation will result in better protection and more efficient management of the forests of the state was high lighted; and in the execution stage the need for conservation was given ^a to go by in favour of fulfilling imaginary revenue targets fixed without considering what the forests can produce without causing irreversible deterioration of the growing stock. The working plan prescriptions both in terms of yield to be taken out and areas to be operated were completely ignored in many cases.

THE SYSTEM AS FOLLOWED:

A study of the records available in the Chief Conservator of Forests(G) office and few of the major Divisions which could be visited, showed the following:

After the Government approved departmentalisation of timber operation and necessary provision of fund was

received, the Chief Conservator of Forests takes up a detail exercise of finalising the work plan for the different Divisions. The expenditure required was met both from the Non-Plan and Plan budgets. The revenue expenditure required to be made in actual operation of the trees in most of the Divisions was met from the Normal (Non-Plan) sector while the cost of infrastructure development, e.g. cost of additional staff, vehicles, heavy equipments buildings and roads, establishment or expansion of saw mills as well as the operational cost of a few smaller Divisions were met from the plan allocations. The Chief Conservator of Forests is competent to sanction revenue expenditure under non-plan budget without limit, subject however to the availability of required provision in the sanctioned budget of the year under the relevant head of account. Specific sanctions were obtained from the Government for expenditures chargeable to plan as well as the capital component of the non-plan expenditures. The detailed work plan as approved by the Chief Conservator of Forests included the quantity of timber and firewood to be extracted and the itemwise

cost of each operation involved. It has been noticed the quantity allowed to be operated as indicated in the approved schemes, had been somewhat on the conservative side compared to the allowable maximum yield prescribed by the respective working plans. The basis on which the quantum of timber to be Departmentally operated was arrived at and why a lower yield was allowed to be operated could not be ascertained. Discussions with different officers of the Department seem to indicate that the then C.C.F. arrived at the figures after considering the facts that (a) nearly 10% of the forest area is under encroachment, where the growing stock has been badly depleted; (b) there has been considerable amount of illegal fellings all over the State resulting in a steady but often unaccounted for depletion of the growing stock; and (c) some of the working plans seemed to have over estimated the growing stock as revealed subsequently when coupes marked covering the prescribed areas repeatedly failed to produce the estimated yield. Shri A.H.Choudhury, presently C.F., Headquarter, mentioned in course of discussion that, while he was holding charge of the Digboi Division, he found that the areas

prescribed for operation consistently failed to produce the prescribed yield year after year. This fact was reported to the Circle Conservator, who after due verification of records and in the field ordered a 15% reduction of the prescribed yield. This was communicated to the D.F.O. by a formal letter and the fact was also recorded in the office inspection register. (Unfortunately neither of the records could be traced in the Digboi Division's office). The Working Plan of the Digboi Division's prescribed the following yields:-

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Plantation Working Circle | 6900 cu.m. |
| Regeneration " " | 46400 cu.m. |
| <hr/> | |
| Total prescribed yield | 53300 cu.m. |

A 15 percent reduction will make the prescribed total yield stand at 45,300 M³. The Digboi Division's Working Plan does not count species other than Hollong and Mekai towards yield. Against this back ground, the C.C.F. approved working of 40,000 Cu.M. of wood inclusive of species other than Hollong and Mekai in approving the programme of Departmental Operation and allotting fund for the same. The Chief Conservator of was very much aware of the Government's commitment to make raw material to the

plywood industry available. As such, C.C.F.'s fixing the target at 40,000 M³ perhaps only indicate that, that was the quantity, he felt, that can be safely taken out of the forests, whatever be the reason of reduction (or increase) of the yield from the working plan prescriptions, the fact remains that the quantity shown in the letters sanctioning Departmental Operation is the quantity authorised to be removed and variation amounts to a deviation from sanction. While a negative deviation may be explained as trees being not silviculturally available or may reflect as an inefficient execution of the scheme, a positive deviation can not be so easily explained. A very minor deviation can be because of difference between the estimated volume of trees marked for felling and the actual outturn there from, which is usually higher. But when the deviations are high and when the estimated volume of trees marked itself is in excess of the volume approved for extraction, there is no explanation except that the action was intentional. Extraction in excess of the authorised quantity amounts to unregulated and also UNAUTHORISED felling and any one doing so irrespective of his being a forest

officer or not is guilty of an offence under the forest act. A forest officer involved in unauthorised felling is more so because his duty is to protect the trees from being illegally felled and not perpetuate illegal felling.

A serious attempt was made to collect the information from all Divisions about the results of the Departmental Operation done upto 1984-85. A questionnaire was prepared and circulated to the Divisions with a letter of request from the Chief Conservator of Forests for furnishing the reports. Repeated reminders from the CCF's level, my personal contact with the circle Conservators of Forests and a number of Divisional Forest Officer failed to get the informations sought. The authenticity of the figures supplied by a few of the Divisions can not be taken for granted as they do not stand scrutiny and in many cases do not bear relation with the figures furnished earlier from time to time in different connections to the C.C.F. It is strange that Divisions can not even furnish basic information like quantity of timber extracted, quantity disposed, expenditure incurred in different operations, revenue

realised etc. even years after completion of the operation. This only shows how uncontrolled and illmanaged (if not unmanaged) the entire operation had been. For example, the Digboi Division earlier reported the quantity of timber operated Departmentally during 1984-85 as 56,009.8 Cu.M. (DFO's NO. G.37(a)/1059-60 dated 8.9.85). The report now received in reply to the questionnaire circulated contains three different figures as the quantity operated during the same period; they are:-

- i. Volume of trees felled and sectioned
(at page 5 Results of operation : actuals : item NO.(e)) = 72,653 M³
- ii. Quantity Departmentally Operated: in column 8 of Form 1B of the questionnaire. = 60,799.4 M³
- iii. Actual quantity operated during the year: in Col. I in form 2(A. Physical) of the same questionnaire = 61,503.3 M³

The information respect to Dibrugarh Division for the same period (84-85) are as follows: Quantity operated as reported by the Circle Conservator (Vide FG.50/6/DOT/Genl/EAC dtd.31.7.85) = 11,116.7 M³. As reported by the DFO (Vide Gc./1/85/1101-02 A dated 29.9.85 = 13,365.3 M³. Information as furnished in reply to the questionair

at page 1 item NO.3 = 10,544.8 M³
at page 6 item NO.(e) = 10,457.9 M³
in form 1B of the Ques. = 9,581.8 M³
in form 1A -do- = 10,710.6 M³

Attempts were made to reconcile the figures without any positive effect. The only explanation put forwarded was that the figures were based on the information collected from the Ranges and there is nothing in the Divisional offices to varify them with. Three years after the close of the operation year the Department can not say what was the quantity of timber operated out of the forests and how much of it is still lying undisposed is some thing unimaginable. Digboi and Dibrugarh are not lone examples, others are equally bad when we come to the year 1984-85. Kamrup (East) never submitted any report earlier to CCF even after repeated reminders - and the present D.F.O. expressed his helplessness not being able to get any information in this respect.

For want of anything better, I have taken the figures available in the CCF's office as the basis for this study. The results of the two years operation i.e. 1983 - 84 and 1984 - 85 are shown in the Statements:

| Name of Division | Quantity of timber-departmental Oprn. | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|----------|--------------|
| | 1983-84 | | 1984-85 | |
| | Approved | Actual | Approved | Actual |
| Dhubri | 18000 | 14700 | 20000 | 4848 7152 |
| Haltugaon | 12000 | 12285 | 12000 | 13287 |
| Kachugaon | 23000 | 16495 | 15000 | 18928 |
| Nagaon | 10000 | 15595 | 15000 | 15566 |
| Lakhimpur | 3000 | 3222 | 1000 | 1737 +626 |
| Kamrup(East) | 6000 | N.A. | 7000 | N.A. |
| Kamrup(West) | 7000 | 12080 * | 15092 | 18116 * |
| Karimganj | 1400 | 1400 | 3000 | 2203 |
| Silchar | 1000 | 748 | 3000 | 1506 |
| Digboi | 40000 | 44582 | 40000 | 56010 |
| Dibrugarh | 8000 | 14877 | 10000 | 13365 |
| Doom Dooma | 10000 | 10640 | 5000 | 7367 |
| Darrang(West) | 15000 | 15633 | 15000 | 12345 |
| Darrang(East) | 10000 | 9200 | 7000 | 4535 |
| North Kamrup | 12000 | 15148 | 12000 | 10344 |
| Aie Valley | 5000 | 3915 * | 5000 | 1898 * |
| Golaghat | 3000 | 4657 | 3000 | 820 +4075 |
| Sibsagar | 5000 | 6034 | 7000 | 5534 |
| Goalpara | 2000 | 2501 | 3000 | 3201 |

N.B. Figures with * are as reported by D.F.O. now. + figures relate to seized timber.

The statement in the prepage will show that there had been considerable deviation between what was approved for operation and what quantity had actually been operated. The Divisions like Haltugaon, Kachugaon, Kamrup West, Digboi, Dibrugarh, Doom Dooma as per records, extracted far in excess of the approved quantity. The excess extraction becomes even more serious when it is deliberately done by a Division in violation of rules and procedures and when senior officers in the ranks of C.F. and C.C.F. fail to take notice even after the matter was brought to their knowledge.

During 1983-84, Sibsagar Division was allotted fund for operating 5000 M³ of timber. At the end of the year the DFO wrote to his Circle Conservator that the rates sanctioned by the CCF for his Division were inadequate. He had also increased the operation to 6000 M³ instead of the approved quantity of 5000 M³ hence he is need of additional fund.

Dibrugarh Division was allowed to operate 8000 M³ only against his proposal of 11000 M³ and he was informed

accordingly vide CCF's NO.FA.39/83-84/
T.O. dated 6.6.83 - i.e. well in time
before the years operation was started.
But in February 1984 the DFO came up with
a proposal for additional fund on the
ground that he has operated 10411.7M³
and further operation was in progress.
He had till then already spent about
40.00 lakhs against he allotment of
29.55 lakhs - his requirement for the
balance operation during the year is
8.00 lakhs more.

The North Kamrup Division
was allowed to operate 12000 M³ of
timber and 3000 st.M³ of firewood but
in February he reported that his anti-
cipated volume of operation will be
21500 M³ timber and 12000 st.M³ fire-
wood.

The Conservator of Forests, East -
ern Assam wrote to CCF for additional
allocation stating that unless more
fellings are done plywood supply to
the mills will be badly effected and
he will not be able to collect the
revenue allotted to his Circle.

Some of the irregularities
were pointed out by the office but the
only tangible result was additional

allocation of Rs.56.00 lakhs to CF(EAC) and Rs.5.00 lakhs to CF(NAC). No questions were asked about the irregularities ! But a caution given to CFs"see that your Circle's allotment of revenue is fully met" In the process of meeting the revenue targets, if the forests are depleted it was no one's concern !

The D.F.O.,Digboi was given an allocation of Rs.116.00 lakhs for Departmental Operation of 40,000 M³ of timber during 1984-85, vide CCF's NO.FA| 39/84-85/TO dated 3.5.1984. The itemwise break up of cost was as follows:-

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| a) Felling, logging, sectioning @ Rs.30/- per M ³ , 40,000 Cu.M. | 12.00 lakhs. |
| b) Dragging from stumpsite to roadside depots & Rs.140/- per M ³ 40,000 M ³ | 56.00 lakhs. |
| c) Transport to storage depot by trucks @ Rs.120/- per M ³ 40,000 M ³ | <u>48.00 lakhs.</u> |
| Total | 116.00 lakhs. |

The D.F.O., Digboi, on 1.3.85 v vide this letter NO.G.37/A/7377-78 addressed to the C.F.(EAC) with a copy endorsed to the CCF, reported that he had already made an expenditure of Rs.149.76 lakhs upto the end of February 1985 against the allocation of Rs.116.00 lakhs received by him; and had already

operated out 53,723.6 M³ of Plywood timber (against 40,000 M³ of Plywood and non plywood timber allowed by the sanction) He wanted an additional allocation of Rs.75.00 lakhs for extraction of further quantity of 12,000 M³ of plywood timber (in addition to the quantity already extracted) and for making payments for works already done (for which no allocation was made) amounting to Rs.37.00 lakhs. The Division ended up the year with an excess expenditure of Rs.67.03 lakhs and what was the actual quantity of timber operated during the year is still uncertain as indicated ~~in~~ earlier. The only action at CCF's level that appeared to have been taken was to submit a supplementary proposal to the Government for sanction of an amount of Rs.6.00 lakhs for operating 2000 M³ of plywood timber (CCF's NO.FD/G/VI-P/TO/'4-85 dated 28.3.85). The expenditure to be met from Plan savings.

Strange facts were revealed while trying to find out the actual quantity of timber operated and disposed during the year 84-85, by consulting the records at the base levels of ranges and depots. Scrutiny of the

records and enquiries made from some of the field level subordinates of the department gave the impression that the Departmental Operation by 84-85 was working with a pinpointed single aim of pleasing the millers and other allottees of timber by making the logs available as quickly as possible. In the haste for pleasing them, the departmental norms and laid-down procedures were completely ignored and given a go-by. The expiry of the timber year on 31.10 necessarily makes all allotment orders to lapse on the 31st Oct. following the date of allotment order. Any quantity not physically delivered (and paid for) within the expiry date gets lapsed needing a renewal order from the competent authority (Govt. in this case). Besides the delay and difficulties involved in getting once lapsed orders renewed, such renewal often entails higher rates to be paid. The allottees' interest, for getting the timber or at least as much of the same as possible within the period of validity of the order is understandable, but the extent to

which the officers of the department went to help the allottees can be seen from the following example.

During the timber year 1983-84 (ending 31st Oct '84, financial year 84-85) some plywood millers obtained allotment orders for plywood logs from the coupes operated under Saraipung Range under the Digboi Division. The outturn of the coupes marked and operated could not meet the requirement of the allottees. Instead of intimating the fact to the DFO, the Range Officer got two additional coupes^P marked in the UDR(WB)/142 as coupe Nos. 7/142 and 8/142 of 1983-84 with 70 and 30 trees respectively. All the marked trees, except one 'Dhuna', were Hollong. Whether the marking of these two additional coupes were with the approval or orders from the DFO or not could not be ascertained from the Range office records. The coupes were marked by one Shri Maneswar Challeng, Forester-I of Kathalguri Beat of Saraipung Range. The tree Marking Field book NO. 817 said to have been used for these coupes in missing from the Range Officer. (A fact recorded by D.F.O. in the recent inspection report of the

range). As such it was not possible to find the actual date on which the marking was recorded, but the weekly diary of the Forester concerned for the relevant period showed that the coupes were marked on 25th and 26th Oct'84. The felling and sectioning of 100 trees of the 2 coupes, were supposed to have been completed by 30th Oct'84, making it possible for the same Forester to piece mark the logs on 27 and 28 Oct. in coupe NO.7 and on 29th and 30th Oct in Coupe NO.8. The tree marking field Book No 817 and the log marking field Book NO.366 used for recording measurements of logs of these two coupes were issued from the Divisional Office to the Range on 31.10.84 and the Range Officer issued them to the Forester concerned on 1st and 2nd Nov. respectively as seen from the entries in the Pass Permit register of the Saraipung Range.

Outturn of these two coupes finds place in P.I. Notes numbers 70-71/107 dated 23.10.84 and subsequently ones issued within the month of Oct'84. All the P.I. Notes were signed by Sri C.K. Gogoi, the then Range Officer, Saraipung Range.

Bills were raised against the above P.I. Notes within Oct'84 and two such bills Nos. SP/NS/89 and SP/NS/90 both dated 23.10.84 were actually paid by the allottee concerned vide T.C. Nos 1983 to 1986 dated 29/30 10.84.

The first log from these two coupes came to the depot only on 21.12.84 as indicated at page 2053 of the depot register of the Kathalguri depot. A check of the Saraipung Logging Range Cash Book showed that, payments in respect of the operation of coupe Nos. 7 and 8/142 were done as follows:-

1. Felling & sectioning costs:-

| | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Coupe NO. 7/142/ | vide Cr. item NO. 16 of | 24.1.85 |
| Coupe NO. 8/142 | vide " | 10. of 16.2.85. |

2. Dragging Charges:

| | | |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Coupe NO. 7/142 | vide Cr. item 23 | dt. 26.2.85 |
| Coupe NO. 8/142 | " | 13 dt. 16.3.85 |

The points of interest here are:

a) Mar^king of trees and logs were recorded on dates prior to the dates of receipt of the field books from the Divisional office.

b) P.I. Notes were prepared showing the outturn of coupes before the coupes were even marked - when they are supposed to be records of joint

passing of logs at the central depots.

The passing officer could anticipate the exact sizes of logs that trees yet to be marked were going to produce.

c) Both tree marking and piece marking of the logs were done by the same forester within the same week. The fact is recorded by the Forester in his weekly diary.

d) Bills were raised on imaginary quantities supposed to have been jointly passed with the allottee and the allottee accepts them and makes payment and waits for months together to lift the logs allowing them to get d~~y~~ried up.

This again is not a solitary instance ^{where} ~~of~~ 'advance P.I. Notes' were prepared to 'catch the dead line'. There are many such cases ^h where logs included in P.I. Notes dated last week of Oct. have arrived the depots even 5 to 7 months after the date of passing, as recorded in the depot registers. Interestingly, such logs go out of the depots on the every day they arrive the depots. This makes one wonder, whether the logs at

all came to the depots or it was shown as such to legalize the "extraction charges" booked in the accounts as cost of Departmental Operation. There are reports that the plywood passing of logs used to be done at the same time as log measurements and the allottees themselves were expected to arrange their transport, which is perhaps true as revealed by the circumstantial evidence but there is no way to prove or disprove it now.

A check on the results of operation of coupe NO.3/III/24 of Sarai-pung showed the following:-

| | |
|---|---|
| Total number of trees marked | 100 |
| No. of logs piece marked | 888 |
| NO. of logs dragged to forest depot | 886 |
| Volume of piece marked logs | 799.14 M ³ |
| Volume of logs dragged to Forest Depot | 794.74 M ³ |
| Number of logs transported to storage depot | 883 |
| Volume of -do- | 794.60 M ³ |
| Number of logs disposed : | Records in the Depot Register incomplete. |

The timber register of the concerned coupe shows 12 logs as undisposed as there is no remark of disposal against those logs. Assuming that

the records as found are authentic - a fact which is doubtful, the questions that naturally come to ^{the} mind are:-

1) Why two of the piece marked logs (Volume $4.4 M^3$) were left in the forests unextracted ?

2) Why three of the logs dragged to road side depot were left untransported to depot - was the volume of those three logs only $0.1 M^3$ as indicated by the recorded volume of 886 and 883 logs seem to indicate ?

3) What happened to the 12 logs remaining undisposed in the depot ?

Leaving of the 2 logs in the forests and 3 more in the roadsides depot after they have been piece marked and recorded in the field books and the timber register of the coupe amounts to virtual writting off of their values and the cost incurred in their operation.

This is the nature of situations noticed in checking the results of coupes operations where some records are available but the records relating to later part of 1984-85 are maintained in such poor condition that checking is

next to impossible. The depot registers, which are expected to show the day to day arrival and disposal of logs to the depot, were more or less discontinued by 1984-85, or where they were maintained, the important columns e.g. dates of arrival and disposal, sources from where logs were received, reference to Extraction Challans or Transit passes under cover of which logs came in or went out etc. Maintenance and submission of timber returns (F.D. Forms NO.1, 2,3 etc.) as prescribed by the forest manual were discontinued, making it impossible to know the stock position of various forest products - inclusive of departmentally operated timber. These are supporting documents to monthly cash accounts and the D.F.Os do not seem to have any authority to discontinue them. But no questions appear to have been asked about this from any level. Attempts are now being made to reconstruct the forms from the time they were discontinued - but their correctness will always remain doubtful as the required basic information like extraction challans themselves are not there.

In the Kakopathar Range of the Doom Dooma Division, a Central Depot was established very near the area of operation within the same Reserve Forest. As no transport outside the Reserve Forest was involved extraction challans were not issued at all. The depot register was also not properly maintained. It is now impossible to check the stock of that depot, neither can the entries in the depot register be varified as there is nothing to varify them with. The Kakopathar Range records showed that during 1984-85 a number of small coupes with 10 Hollong trees each were marked as "Defective trees coupe" What the term "Defective" included could not be ascertained. The present Range Officer too could not give a convincing explanation. But, the timber registers of the coupes showed that practically the entire outturn of the so-called defective trees coupes went as plywood logs. If the outturn of the trees satisfy the specification of plywood timber, the basis on which the trees themselves were classified as "defective" ones,

calls for a more convincing explanation, and it makes one wonder if it was not a convenient way of removing some selected trees which otherwise were silviculturally not available.

It was noticed that in the joint passing of plywood logs, there is a system of giving allowance on length/ or girth or both length and girth for making marginally below specification plywood logs acceptable to the industry. This system seems to be a legacy from the days when the plywood logs were procured from the plywood coupe holders and then supplied to the millers to meet the Government's commitment to make raw material available at concessional prices. At that time logs used to be bought from the coupe holders on payments for the discounted volume and the same volume was paid for by the industry, as such there was no loss involved in the transaction. The coupe holders would have already paid the Government valuation of the logs as purchase price of the coupes. But when the logs are supplied to the industry from the Departmentally operated

timber, the situation is no longer same. Logs are government property, and there is a Government revenue due on them till they are disposed and price realised. As such if the price is realised on a reduced volume, it amounts to writing off of a part of the value resulting in loss of revenue. More over the investment made on the operation of the logs, which is charged on per unit volume basis also partly remains unrecovered.

It has been noticed that practically every P.I. Note issued in the Digboi, Doomdooma and Dibrugarh Divisions contains 10 to 15% logs where allowances from 10 to 50 cm in length and 10 to 30 cm in girth has been made. An allowance in length does not effect the volume as much as an allowance by the same quantum on girth does. A statement given in the next page will show that a 10 cm allowance on a 3 M. long log will reduce its volume only by 3.3% but a 10 cm allowance in girth results in effective reduction of the volume by 7 to 10% depending on the girth of the log - larger the log smaller is the effect.

A STATEMENT SHOWING THE EFFECT OF 10 CM
ALLOWANCE ON LENGTH GIRTH AND LENGTH &
GIRTH ON A 3 M. LONG LOG OF GIRTH FROM
200 CM TO 260 CM

| Girth | Volume | | | | | | |
|-------|--------|-------|-----|-------|-----|----------|------|
| | Actual | L-10 | P.C | G-10 | P.C | L & G-10 | P.C |
| 200 | 0.750 | 0.725 | 3.3 | 0.677 | 9.7 | 0.654 | 12.8 |
| 210 | 0.827 | 0.799 | 3.3 | 0.750 | 9.3 | 0.725 | 12.3 |
| 220 | 0.908 | 0.877 | 3.3 | 0.827 | 8.9 | 0.799 | 12.0 |
| 230 | 0.992 | 0.959 | 3.3 | 0.908 | 8.5 | 0.877 | 11.6 |
| 240 | 1.080 | 1.044 | 3.3 | 0.992 | 8.1 | 0.959 | 11.2 |
| 250 | 1.172 | 1.133 | 3.3 | 1.080 | 7.8 | 1.044 | 10.9 |
| 260 | 1.268 | 1.225 | 3.3 | 1.172 | 7.6 | 1.133 | 10.6 |

This statement will indicate that if 10 percent of the plywood logs suffer an allowance of 10 percent in their volume the overall effect on the total plywood supply will have an effect of 1% reduction in volume, the revenue on which is lost by the Department. This may appear as a negligible amount but when the total quantity of supply is considered, the amount involved becomes considerable (Digboi Division alone accounted for 37,533.5 M³ during 1984-85 - which will mean a loss of revenue on 379.3 M³ and an infructuous expenditure of over One lakh on their extraction).

If departmentally operated logs have to be disposed after giving allowances, it only casts an adverse reflection on the efficiency and standard of the operation carried out by the Department. It has also been noticed that where ever the disposal of the outturn of the Departmentally operated logs was by allotment or permits, the operating agency neglected the operation of the portions of the trees which were not immediately required for handing over to the allottees against orders held by them.

This went to the extent of portions of trees being left unextracted and left in the forests to rot. Thus one of the very basic purposes and aim of resorting to departmental operation, i.e. "the most efficient and complete extraction of the produce" is lost. Plywood passing, instead of being done at the depots, after logs were brought to the depots, was actually done in the stump-side or at the forest depots. Quite often it was reportedly done at the same time (or immediately before) as piecemarking

of the logs. Otherwise, how else can we explain the P.I. Notes where not only the logs appear serially but even the tree numbers appear in sequence. It is unimaginable that the process of dragging by elephants to the forest depots and transport by trucks to the sale depots was so done that the sequence of the logs remained unchanged and undisturbed. What the allottees were not interested to accept as plywood logs or rejected plywood or saw timber, the Department was not interested to bring them to the depots. If the reports received are anything to go by, such unwanted timber were not even piece marked. I am unofficially told by Forest officials who were engaged in Departmental Operation (Who in all probability, will deny if officially asked) that they neither had the time nor the facilities available then to extract timbers which was not required to meet the allottee's demand. They were under constant pressure from all quarters to meet the allottee's

~~demand. They were under constant pressure from all quarters to meet the allottee's quotas.~~ Allotments were made not based on timber available in the depots but trees had to be felled and logs made available because allotment orders were there.

Elsewhere in the Sal areas, portions of trees which could have been converted as timber - although may not be of the sizes preferred by the market or of prime quality - were allowed to be converted to firewood by sectioning them to 1 metre lengths. In fact lots of such so called firewood have been procured by saw millers and converted them to various sawn sizes. One metre long sawn scantlings have a ready market for Assam type building constructions, bridge railing posts and struts, furniture industry etc.

Where ever allotments were given by the Government whether it was for plywood or rejected plywood or saw logs of B. and C class timber, the quantity allotted was far in excess of the available stock of logs. The prices

were fixed by the Government. In other words in a sellers market where the demand far exceeded the supply and the prices are controlled and the normal demand and supply functions were not allowed to operate, what one should normally expect, has happened. Buyers needed preferential treatments to get the commodity, and the buyers were ready to offer necessary considerations for receiving such preferential treatments. The normal market forces, under such conditions, instead of escalating the price of the commodity escalated the value of considerations. Departmental operation only came in as a handy tool in the entire system under which the entire forest department was operating at that time. It will therefore, be wrong to say "departmentalisation of operation has also departmentalised malpractices". A situation was created and thrust upon the department with active or passive connivance of a few in the departments hierarchy and many others availed the chance to exploit the situation for personal gains. There is nothing wrong in the process and

practice of Departmental Operation per-
se but the conditions under which it
was practiced and the way it was exe-
cuted was totally wrong. It was the
"Free for all" situation created and
allowed to prevail during the period,
which is to be squarely blamed for all
the mal-practices resulting in huge lo-
ss to the Government revenue and wastage
of scarce forest resources and not the
Departmental Operations.

But every thing said and done,
it has to be admitted that the forest
official can not get themselves abso-
lved of the blame and responsibilities
of allowing the forest areas under
their custody to be depleted and demu-
ded of the growing stock. No large sc-
ale illegal operation of timber with-
in the Reserved Forests under normal
circumstances is possible without the
convience of some forest staff at some
level or other. The Department is solely
manned by trained personnel, who are
expected to possess the basic silvic-
ultural knowledge to decide which tree
is silviculturally available under the
approved management technic.

All allotment orders issued by the Government for timber of various qualities were subject to their availability, i.e. their removal being permissible under due silvicultural considerations. It was the responsibility of the technical department to raise the point of unavailability of the material and the possible effect the forests will have if the excess quantity is removed. The department in the peak period of operation failed to perform this duty at all levels. The explanation normally put forward for this lapse on the part of the Department is invariably to mean "No one will heed to such objections during that time" do not seem to hold much water as it presupposes an imaginary situation and even if it is taken as true, had objections been raised the responsibility of depleting the forests of the state would no longer have rested on the department. Govt. with its over-riding powers could always ignore such valid objections, but failure on the part of Department to offer proper technical guidance to the Govt. can not be justified by an unfounded assumption.

To summarise the findings:-

7

1) This enquiry reveals that legal, illegal or legalised illegal operations of the forests far in excess of what the forests can stand had taken place during the period when the forests were under so called Departmental Operation.

Many areas will need to be given complete rest except for sanitation fellings and if necessary aided artificially to get them back under proper forest cover. They will require to be given proper protection so that the younger trees, poles and saplings escape further damage by biotic factors.

2) It will not be possible to stop all illicit fellings in the forests completely under the prevailing situation of pressure on forest areas from different quarters and an ever increasing demand for forest produce.

There is a very large installed capacity of wood based industries within the State which will try to procure raw material to keep the industries viable. If all legal sources dry up, there will be a higher

pressure of illegalities on the forests through engineered encroachment and clearings. This is a situation which can be easily foreseen and it is essential that it is guarded against to the best of capacity.

4) Such a large scale illegalities could not have occurred without support of the custodians at some level or other in the hierarchy. Whatever be the system of management and operation followed it is going to be executed by the same set of personnel in the Department. The morale of the Department is at a low ebb because the entire Department is suffering for the actions and inactions of a few. The Department's morale needs to be boosted up.

5) Departmental operation has not been given a proper trial to prove its suitability or otherwise except for Goalpara Divisions in the initial stage. What was done in the name of Departmental Operation was an uncontrolled operation through the same set of contractors with the restrictions and bindings under which they were operating the coupes and mahal, removed. The departmentalisation

of operation introduced with the professed aim of removing the middle man traders, in practice introduced few more middleman under the piece work system of operation. The work which was done by one single contractor under proper agreement is now done by a number of contractors e.g. felling contractor, dragging contractor, off road transport contractor and on-road transport contractor etc. without any binding except for proper execution of the work they are engaged for.

6) Departmentalisation of timber operation was adopted without proper infrastructure being created. The middleman contractor was tried to be eliminated. An useful link in a chain can not be eliminated, it can only be replaced with another link if the chain was to remain functional. The contractors set up can not be removed without replacing it with an equally, if not more efficient set up in the Department. Thirty or forty contractors with their all supporting paraphernalia of men and material can not be effectively replaced by providing two or three

Forest Rangers with half a dozen supporting staff under them. As situations demanded, the normal staff of the Department whose duty is to grow and protect the trees were diverted to cutting them - in the process both growing and cutting suffered.

7) Departmental operation and subsequent disposal of the produce is a Commercial venture. The produce is perishable to different degrees depending on the species. The persons responsible for their disposal must possess adequate financial and administrative powers to take immediate and spot decisions on their disposal. No adequate powers were delegated to the Department for arranging quick disposal. The requirement of sanctions and approvals, want of powers to fix the value of the produce based on the quality and condition and the wrong notion that the value of all timber in whatever state of deterioration it may be, has to be fixed only on the basis of the Royalty rates fixed for timber from the Unclassed state forests of

comparable species and size is responsible for large quantity of logs lying undisposed till they completely deteriorate. A commercial venture can not be run within the existing framework of financial rules.

Suggestions for future plan of action

Timber harvest is an integral part of forest management. As a renewable resource, trees have to be cut and utilised when they attain maturity. Government have imposed a moratorium on all green wood fellings except for regeneration purposes. This situation can continue till the scars of misuse of the forests are obliterated. Some felling of trees and removal will have to be permitted on strict silvicultural needs, sanitation fellings of dead and decaying trees which otherwise will become foci of spread of diseases and pests. Besides the forest department has a social commitment to keep - to make available basic timber needs for construction of houses making of furniture etc. As such timber operation can not be stopped - the quantum may vary but the operation will always be there. Two alternatives for timber operation are available:-

1. Departmental operation to be completely scrapped reverting back to the old system of operation through Purchaser's agency.