

Bamboo coffins help curb deforestation in India

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Constructing coffins out of bamboo could be one way to curb rampant deforestation in northeastern India, according to a youth group in Mizoram that has launched a movement to develop eco-friendly methods of burial for the state's Christians.

The idea, proposed by the Young Mizo Association, has been lauded by the state's minister of environment and forests, H. Rohluna. Some 98 percent of the state's population is Christian, many of whom use expensive teak and sal trees for coffins because of their durability and high density.

But the association, who launched the "Green Mizoram" initiative three years ago, of which the coffin campaign is this year's focus, thinks a change to bamboo coffins would help keep in check the rate of felling in the region.

"The campaign for green coffins will continue until every single dead person in the state is laid to rest in a bamboo coffin," said Vanlalruata, general secretary of the Young Mizo Association.

The most recent forestry survey of Mizoram shows that from 2009 to 2011, the state lost 66 square kilometers of forest. Continued deforestation will adversely affect the livelihoods of people living there.

Bamboo forests, on the other hand, cover around 57 percent of the state's land area, according to government records. Although the cutting of bamboo will also have some impact on the environment, Vanlalruata argues that this "largest grass" grows faster than any tree and thus would take less time to replenish.

He adds that many coffin makers are beginning to switch to bamboo. As an introductory move, the association recently donated some 200 coffins to hospitals, mostly in the Mizoram state capital of Aizawl.

The bamboo coffins are also cost effective. While hardwood coffins go for between 9,000 and 14,000 rupees (\$160-250), a bamboo coffin costs on average 2,500 rupees (approximately \$42).

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