

Under the axe

Forest areas continue to decrease though plantations are slowing down the rate of net loss

■ The earth's total forest area continues to decrease but the rate of net loss is slowing down. From 2000-2005, the forest area decreased at the rate of 7.3 million hectares (mha) per year from 8.9 mha per year over 1990-2000

■ South America (4.3 mha per year) and Africa (four mha annually) continued to register the largest net loss of forests, followed by Oceania, North America and Central America (each with 3,500,000 ha annually). Oceania suffered net loss of forests despite increase in plantation area

■ The overall decrease in net loss of forests was due to increased plantation forests mostly in the Asia-Pacific region. Asia, which had a net loss of about 8,00,000 ha per year in the 1990s, reported a net gain of one mha per year from 2000 to 2005, primarily as a result of large-scale plantations. Of the 10 countries in the world with the largest plantation areas, six are in Asia — China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand and Vietnam

■ China posted an overall increase in forest area of more than four mha per year between 2000 and 2005, while India posted an increase of about 290,000 ha per year over the same period mostly because of plantations

■ Primary (natural) forests account for 36 per cent of forest area. During the past five years, more than six mha per year of primary forests were lost/modified, mainly converted to agricultural land and oil palm cultivation. This means a loss of more than one mha of natural forest occurred each year over the period

■ India is among the countries with large plantation forestry. But the loss of natural forests is alarming. According to an estimate by the Indian government, in the period 2001-2003, the area under natural forest decreased by 2.6 mha per year, while that under plantation forestry increased by 2.9 mha. This meant a net gain in forest cover of 300,000 ha annually

■ Plantation forests — consisting primarily of introduced species — make up an estimated 3.8 per cent of the total forest area or 140 mha globally

■ Productive plantations, established mainly for wood and fibre production, account for 78 per cent of plantation forests, while protective plantations, primarily established for conservation of soil and water, account for only 22 per cent. During 2000-2005, the area under plantation forests has increased by about 2.8 mha per year, 87 per cent of it under productive plantations

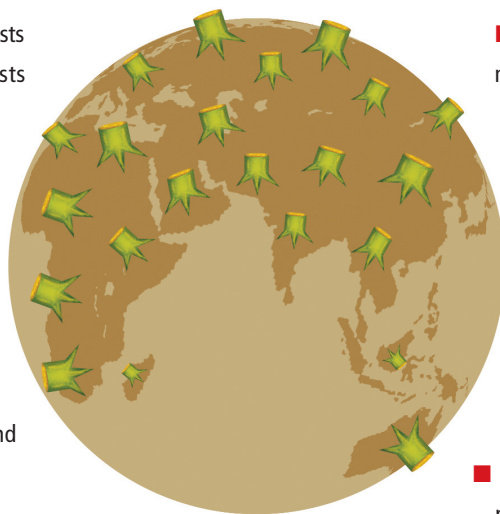
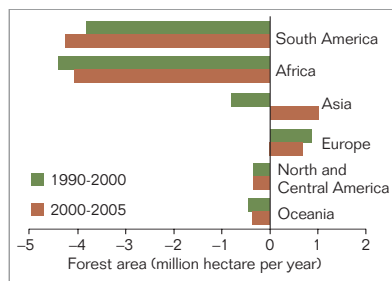
■ European countries and Japan registered positive change rates in the area of primary forests. But this was possible partly due to a change in their classification of primary forests, which now include "forests with no human interventions" that can "evolve over time into primary forest"

■ The world's forests store 283 gigatonnes (Gt) of carbon in their biomass alone. Carbon in forest biomass decreased in

Africa, Asia and South America in the period 1990-2005, but increased in all other regions. Globally, carbon stocks in forest biomass decreased by 1.1 Gt of carbon annually, owing to continued deforestation and forest degradation

Less loss

Annual net change in forest area



Productive growth

Changes in plantation area, 1990-2005

