

Delhi HC appoints former judge to head committee on protection of forests

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NEW DELHI: Delhi High Court on Thursday appointed its former judge Justice Najmi Waziri as chairperson of an internal departmental committee of city officials dealing with the protection of forests in the national capital. Justice Tushar Rao Gedela observed that while the Forest department officials are working for protection of the city's forests, the land owning departments are "not serious enough" in rendering their assistance to the committee.

"In that view of the matter, it would be apposite to appoint a retired high court judge of this court to head the committee so as to ensure that the other departments are under an obligation to cooperate with the committee," the court said.

"It is thus deemed appropriate to request Hon'ble Justice Najmi Waziri, retired judge of this high court, to accept the chairmanship of the intradepartmental committee, which would ably assist the judge," it stated.

Justice Waziri, famously known as the "green judge" of Delhi for his efforts to enrich the greenery of the national capital by asking litigants to plant 3.7 lakh trees in several cases, demitted office last July.

On December 21, the high court had directed the constitution of the "internal departmental committee" consisting of the chief conservator of forest, conservator of forest and deputy conservator of forest (protecting and monitoring) and the deputy conservator of forest concerned for the preservation of deemed forests. It had said the committee would ensure concrete steps are taken for protection, preservation, reclamation and

enhancement of forests, both protected and deemed.

Amici curiae Gautam Narayan and Aditya N Prasad on Thursday urged Justice Gedela to modify the December order and appoint a retired high court judge as chairman of the committee to ensure its effective functioning.

They said the issue was not adversarial in nature and the nomination of a former judge to the committee would cast an obligation on the other departments to assist the committee in collating the relevant record.

"It is clear that all the parties are adverting and moving towards the goal of ensuring that forests and deemed forests are protected from further incursions and denudation. However, it appears to this court that the other land owning departments are not serious enough in collating or assisting the committee in collating the necessary documents and records," the court observed as it modified the earlier order.

The court said it expected all the departments to cooperate with the committee and asked the Delhi government to provide secretarial facilities and assistance to Justice Waziri.

During his tenure as judge, Justice Waziri passed several orders on increasing the city's green cover. He had directed the planting of 10,000 trees from the funds deposited by defaulting litigants as costs in several matters.

The matter will be next heard on July 29.