

## **Forest density enhanced during past four years: President Sirisena**

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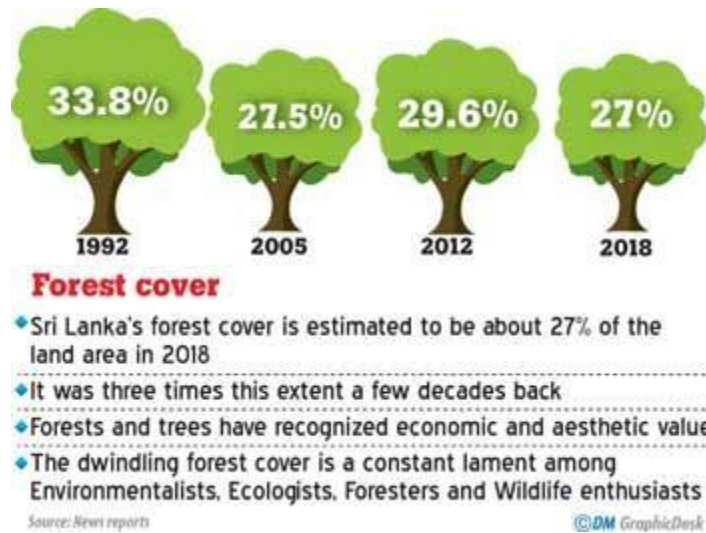
Although forest density declined during past governments, it improved in the past four years owing to the national programme implemented to preserve the environment and increase forest resources, President Maithripala Sirisena said.

He said this addressing the inauguration of the 'Wana Ropa' tree-planting programme held last Sunday at the Habarana Galoya Reserve. "Racketeers, businessmen and public officials are responsible for the enormous environmental damage that has taken place over the past few decades when all sectors of the country were plagued by corruption and politics," he said.

Parallel to the 'Punarudaya' environmental protection programme implemented by the Presidential Secretariat since 2015, the Mahaweli Development and Environment Ministry and the Forest Department together with all government and non-governmental organisations launched 'Wana Ropa' in October.

The Forest Department is rehabilitating 100 hectares of forest in the Habarana Galoya Reserve under the patronage of Bank of Ceylon (BOC) to mark the latter's 80th anniversary. Its aim is to plant some 80,000 saplings covering 100 hectares of degraded dry area.

'Wana Ropa' is in line with the United Nations Climate Change Convention to increase national forest cover to 32 percent by 2030. Special projects have been implemented this year to increase forest density.



President Sirisena planted a sapling in the reserve to commence the tree planting month of the year and signed declarations in many areas including Matale, Kandy, Kurunegala and Nuwara Eliya Districts, gazetting 9,900 hectares as protected forest and 14,800 hectares of mangroves as protected and reserve forests.

He also inked a gazette notification announcing the reservation of Galoya Reserve which is adjacent to the Colombo–Trincomalee highway at Habarana in the Polonnaruwa District.

State Minister of Mahaweli Development and Environment Ajith Mannapperuma, Forest Conservation Department Director General W.A.C. Weragoda and BOC Chairman Ronald C. Perera PC were present at the occasion.