

Forest dept starts afforestation drive on Perungalathur-Puzhal outer ring road

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Chennai: Nearly a decade after the Perungalathur-Puzhal outer ring road was laid, the forest department with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) have begun an afforestation drive, covering 32km.

A senior forest officer told TOI that planting work started a week ago. The department is planting only flowering plant species. Some of them are meant for avenues. Only these trees grow faster and provide a canopy to the stretch very quickly, he said. Naaval, Iluppai, Pungal, Mayil Konnai, Iyal Vaagai, Magizham and Shenbagam are some of the species that will be planted along the outer ring road, he said.

Similarly, the Tiruvallur forest division has started planting saplings on a 59km stretch, from Tiruttani to Tamil Nadu border. It's being carried out in association with the NHAI, the officer said. "We are planning to continue the planting work till it rains. If it stops raining this month, we will start planting again in October and by that month end, the planting work will be completed," he said.

A tree planting enthusiast, D Vijayabaskar of Alwarpet, said the department has just begun planting saplings on the Perungalathur-Puzhal outer ring road. At least three highways similar to this are barren without a single tree, they also need the attention of the forest department and the NHAI, he pointed out.

For example, take the case of Red Hills to Gummidipoondi national highway. This stretch has no trees. More than a decade ago, the forest department planted saplings in a phased manner along this stretch. A few years ago, the NHAI started road widening work and the first casualty was the grownup trees. The widening work is still in progress and there is no effort to take up an afforestation programme, he lamented.

Similarly, Madhya Kailash to Mahabalipuram, Tambaram-Maduravoyal and Poonamallee to Perambakkam are some of the highways, which don't have trees and there are efforts to take up afforestation work, he said.

Another activist on condition of anonymity said the planted saplings require at least year-long protection. If the saplings are damaged, the tree guards will disappear as well. The department should ensure that the saplings are not damaged, he said.

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