

Forest station, control room among plans to protect trees

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NEW DELHI: Establishment of a forest station with lock-up facilities, 24x7 control rooms at par with police control room, prosecution cell and creation of a dedicated website and mobile application are some of the features of a draft SOP on Delhi Preservation of Trees Act.

The draft SOP on DPTA has been prepared by the forest department on the order of Delhi High Court and will be notified soon. It focuses on preventing offences under the act.

FEATURES OF DRAFT SOP

➤ **Establishment of forest station** at headquarter-level with lockup facilities



wheelers and basic equipment

➤ Creation of a dedicated **website and mobile application**



➤ **Establishment of 24X7 control rooms** on a par with the police control rooms at headquarter and divisional levels



➤ **Establishment of quick reaction teams (QRT)** equipped with four-



➤ **Establishment of prosecution cell** at the headquarter and divisional levels for efficient monitoring and prosecution of cases



➤ **Forest officials** to be given equipment



How it will help the forest department

➤ SOP has guidelines for QRTs and beat officers on how to deal with complaints

➤ It has directions for tree officer on conducting of hearings, investigation



and timely prosecution for violations under the Act

➤ It directs the tree officer to conclude the inquiry preferably within two months from the date of receipt of the complaint

During a hearing of a matter on March 23, the high court had observed that "there are no directions or guidelines regarding how a tree officer should deal with the complaints apropos conduct of hearing relating to the damage of trees or violation of any other provision of the act."

The present SOP has directions for tree officers in conducting hearings, investigation, and timely prosecution for violations under the act and guidelines for beat officers on steps to be taken after they receive any complaint. It

asks tree officers to conclude the inquiry preferably within two months from the date of receipt of the complaint.

A senior forest official said, "The draft DPTA SOP has to be notified by Delhi government. Apart from directions for forest officials, the SOP mentions some facilities that will help the department in controlling the violations under the act."

According to the SOP, the forest and wildlife department will have a control room at headquarter and divisional levels and they will have an interface with the control rooms of Delhi Police, Delhi Fire Service and Centralised Accident and Trauma Services for ensuring immediate response as and when the situation requires. The department will deploy quick response teams at headquarter level and in every forest division with adequate manpower and equipment necessary to carry out the mandate of the act. The department will create a dedicated website to cover the entire life cycle of a complaint made under the act.

"The forests and wildlife department will establish a forest station at the central forest division headquarter, with adequate lock-up facilities," the SOP said.

Welcoming the move, Bhavreen Kandhari, a tree activist, said, "When we file a complaint with the tree helpline, most of the complaints are not even acknowledged for many days. The delay leads to more offences under the DPTA Act. However, we hope that SOP is notified soon as it will play an important role in saving the city's ecology."