

Green drive to start with Red Rd urban forest

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Kolkata: The state forest department plans to develop urban forests—Nagar Vatika Van—at the heart of the city. The first such forest will be developed on a 10-hectare plot in Maidan off Red Road. Such forests will be developed in other districts as well.

In North 24 Parganas, four such forests will be developed, for which land has already been identified. “These forests will be developed as carbon sinks which will help fight climate change. We are asking urban local bodies to earmark locations for these green oases,” said state forest minister Jyotipriya Mallick

Trees with dense foliage and high-value timber will be planted so that the urban forests can be self-sustainable. “As far as the off-Red Road project, we are already in talks with the Army as they are the custodian of the Maidan,” Mallick said. Because of rapid urbanization, a lot of trees were felled or axed; the impact on the environment is known to everyone, urban forests can compensate for the loss to some extent, he said.

While a new urban forest is being planned, the older one near JL Nehru Road and Mayo Road crossing is in a shambles. “The forest department must restore it to its old glory,” said Ajay Mittal, director, India & South Asia, Earth Day Network.

“We plan urban gardens in places like Kolkata, Barrackpore, Durgapur, and Haldia— those known as non-attainment cities for consistently exceeding the pollution safe limits. We will ask local municipalities to provide us space for this purpose,” environment minister Manas Bhuniya said.

The forest minister said they were stressing on planting sandalwood and teak trees in the urban forests for cost recovery of such projects. “Red and white sandalwood trees are being brought from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, along with one crore other saplings which would be planted under the Sabuj Shree scheme,” Mallick said.

He also also said that the Banabitan complex in Salt Lake Central Park has been revamped with plantation of new species. The urban forest at Banabitan will be inaugurated soon. “The forest department can develop forest pockets if they get land of over 10 hectares and close to 50 hectares. In such places, we can set up enclosures to keep deer and other animals,” he said.