

High court seeks 750 hectares in Delhi for alternative forest

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NEW DELHI: Give 750 hectares of continuous land in the city for an alternative forest, Delhi High Court told the forest department Tuesday, terming the 0.23 acres offered earlier as "a joke." "We need several hectares for alternate forest, but you are offering 0.23 acres, this can't be, it is a joke.... we owe it to future generations to give them good quality of air in Delhi," Justice Jasmeet Singh remarked.

Pointing out that Delhi government's departments, including forest, are "planners" who must chart out the long-term interests of the residents, the court said the national capital "cannot just be concrete all over" as forests and trees are required to improve air quality.

The court told the forest department that "we do not have the luxury of time" as the existing natural forest cover - the ridge area - "is old and its life is coming to an end.

"We want a forest which will be ready in ten to fifteen years. For that, identify the area. Give us 750 hectares like the ridge, which is 800 hectares. We will be satisfied. We will develop a forest," the court told the special secretary, forest department, asking him to identify the land.

When the official submitted that the matter had to be discussed with the land-owning agencies and sought time, the court told him to "take a bird's eye view" and "get over the clutter." HC also clarified that the patch would be planted with indigenous trees and maintained directly by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF).

The special secretary informed the court that Delhi's "green cover" has increased from 151 sq. km in 2001 to 342 sq. km in 2021. The judge, asked the official to inform the court about the "forest cover" and not sporadic trees on the roadside.

The court also asked the forest department to fill up vacant posts, while directing the PCCF to file an affidavit on the level of encroachment in the forest sanctuaries in Delhi.

Last month, the court had directed authorities to survey for land to create another forest area. "How does a city beat pollution besides what the government is doing? The more green cover you have, better the life of the citizens," it had noted.



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