

UP government to plant 22 crore saplings this season

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A forest department official said seven crore saplings would be planted this year on its land | File photo from REUTERS

Concerned over depleting forest cover and scanty rainfall, the Uttar Pradesh government has set an ambitious target of planting 22 crore saplings this rainy season.

Work on identifying sites, arranging free distribution of saplings, and interaction with stakeholders, has already begun.

Schools and colleges have been asked to look for spots where planting of saplings can take place in August.

A large number of voluntary organisations have been involved in accelerating greening efforts in the eco-sensitive Taj Trapezium Zone (TPZ). Agra's green cover has fallen sharply to around six per cent due to large scale construction and road building in all directions.

The Uttar Pradesh government has sought the active involvement of all the village panchayats, the forest and the horticulture departments, to provide land for sapling plantation next month.

According to the Forest Survey report, Uttar Pradesh's green cover is only 9.18 per cent while 33 per cent land has to be under green cover as per rules.

A forest department official said seven crore saplings would be planted this year on its land. The state government has appealed to two crore farmers, who are beneficiaries under one scheme or the other, to plant 10 saplings each.

Geo tagging will help identify plantation work that is undertaken. Independent agencies will monitor the progress of the green campaign in the state, an official said.

Agra's target has been fixed at 28.57 lakh saplings. The forest department will plant 8.6 lakh saplings while the remaining 25 state government departments will plant 19.97 lakh. Sapling distribution will start next week and the whole process has to be completed by August 15.

Last year, lakhs of saplings were planted in haste. For want of care and follow up, the exercise failed to yield desired results.

Social activists are wondering whether this year's campaign would be any different.

"Only those green stretches have survived where the locals took good care of the saplings. Happily this season we are seeing many voluntary groups actively joining the green campaign. They have the passion and the resources.

"Harvijay Bahia has successfully proven how green pockets can be developed, as in the Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Kar Kunj colony, St Peter's College and several other places where saplings have now grown up as trees. The Eco Club is doing useful work in the Paliwal Park," Shravan Kumar Singh, a green activist of the city, said.

The Agra Municipal Corporation has undertaken a project to green the Yamuna river bank. Holes are being drilled, and we hope the stretch from Balkeshwar to Hathi Ghat will appear lush green soon, said Ranjan Sharma, an environmentalist associated with the River Connect Campaign.

"Even if half the saplings planted this season manage to survive, it will be a huge achievement. Gradually, the movement for greening of Uttar Pradesh could be accelerated in a phased manner, to give desired results," Devashish Bhattacharya, a local environmentalist, added.

Source: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/uttar-pradesh-government-plant-22-crore-saplings-1570975-2019-07-18>