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50,000 penalty on shop for chopping tree

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Chennai: The Tamil Nadu Green Committee not just stopped a fully grown 'pungan' tree from being chopped at Udumalpet in Tirupur but also penalised a commercial establishment in Chennai to the tune of 50,000 to send out a message to protect trees growing on public land.

At 5.15 am on Thursday, when a walker saw a truck and some men trying to chop a tree on M G Road in Shashtri Nagar, he immediately informed the city-based NGO, Nizhal. T D Babu, trustee of the NGO informed the state environmental secretary, Supriya Sahu, about it.

"It is not the first time that they were doing this. A few months ago, the same team, in the name of transplanting a tree, had chopped a neem tree. Later, they tried to concretise the entire area even encroaching upon the

footpath. And today, when they were chopping its branches without permission, I raised a complaint with the environmental secretary. She immediately sent a team of forest officials to the spot," said T D Babu.

Supriya Sahu is the chairperson of the Tamil Nadu Green committee that was recently set up by the state government under its green Tamil Nadu mission to ensure 33% of forest cover in the state. "As soon I was informed, the district forest officer was informed. They found that it was corporation land and so the corporation's park overseer was also informed about the incident. After investigation, we penalised the private entity 50,000," she said.

District officer, V Priyadarshini. said the Green committee has given tooth to the earlier existing laws.

Since the act has come into being, activists and civil society are seeking to be part of the committee. "It will soon be done. The district collector has to invite residents, activists and NGOs to be part of it. The model code of conduct got over on February

24. It will now be done,” said Priyadarshini.

Now on, activists can inform the committee and forest officials along with the concerned department would investigate and take strict action. Supriya Sahu said that they will frame guidelines and rules such that the tree cover outside the forest area is also protected.