

KERALA

# Afforestation campaign in non-forest areas

**Staff Reporter**

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## Seedlings will be planted in areas coming under both private and public ownership

The Forest Department has formulated a 'Vrikshasamrudhi' social forestry scheme that involves a collaboration with the Local Self Government Department and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (MGNREGS) to undertake afforestation drives in non-forest areas.

According to Forest Minister A.K. Saseendran, the scheme will focus on increasing the tree cover in the State. Seedlings will be planted in areas coming under both public and private ownership. Schools, local bodies, government and non-government organisations and farmers will be brought under the ambit of the programme.

A key feature of the Vrikshasamrudhi scheme will be the creation of job opportunities in the rural sector by exploiting the potential of MGNREGS for the planting and maintenance activities that used to be earlier undertaken by groups hired on contractual basis.

Marking the culmination of preparatory works for the programme that got under way with a meeting Mr. Saseendran had with Local Self-Government Minister M.V. Govindan in September last, the Forest Department issued the guidelines for the scheme few days ago.

The social forestry wing of the Forest Department will provide technical assistance and necessary seeds for establishing the nurseries, while local bodies will bear the cost for establishing such facilities. As many as 758 locations have been identified across the State to set up the nurseries.

The government has targeted nurturing and planting 43.5 lakh seedlings at a cost of ₹45 lakh this year.

The Forest and Local Self Government Departments will jointly nurture the seedlings and maintain the plants for up to five years.

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