

Delhi pollution: Clearing a forest in order to grow a forest

19 October 2020

New Delhi, Oct 19 (IANS): It is that time of the year again-when the weather is pleasant but the city is polluted. Air quality has shown a massive decline as farmers in Delhi's neighbouring states burn rice stalks after harvest. Increasing pollution also brings along action and a change in government policies. As these come at the last minute, many do not resonate either with ground realities or with public interest.

In the last fortnight, India's capital city was treated to a bizarre act of plantation and a proposed policy change that set off a fiery debate.

First the action-the Delhi forest department decided to plant saplings in the Central Ridge. To set this benign task in motion, it cleared off the existing greenery by using earth-moving equipment and then planted the saplings. In simple words, the department decided to clear a forest in order to grow a forest. The area looks perceptibly less green. The new plants, if they survive, will need at least two to three years of care and protection. And, till these plants grow up to become trees, Delhi will look a little less green and its air a little more polluted.

The recklessness with which our governments and civic agencies treat environment does not end here. The officials also decided to plant saplings almost three months after the acknowledged planting season was over. Most people know that saplings planted during the Delhi monsoon months of July and August have higher rates of survival. In essence, it was a senseless act that involved spending considerable money on JCBs and labor to destroy an existing forest.

A loud thought: if the same saplings had been planted elsewhere, maybe we would have two forests instead of one broken forest as the case is now.

Now we talk about the policy. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced transplantation of trees. This is a decision that has remained controversial for over a decade now. The results of tree transplantation over the past years have been anything but positive. The act involves considerably fanfare with photographs, and much money has been wasted on converting a living tree into a dead one, courtesy, transplanting fully-grown trees.

It is that time of the year again-when the weather is pleasant but the city is polluted. Air quality has shown a massive decline as farmers in Delhi's neighbouring states burn rice stalks after harvest. Increasing pollution also brings along action and a change in government policies. As these come at the last minute, many do not resonate either with ground realities or with public interest.

In the last fortnight, India's capital city was treated to a bizarre act of plantation and a proposed policy change that set off a fiery debate.

First the action-the Delhi forest department decided to plant saplings in the Central Ridge. To set this benign task in motion, it cleared off the existing greenery by using earth-moving equipment and then planted the saplings. In simple words, the department decided to clear a forest in order to grow a forest. The area looks perceptibly less green. The new plants, if they survive, will need at least two to three years of care and protection. And, till these plants grow up to become trees, Delhi will look a little less green and its air a little more polluted.

The recklessness with which our governments and civic agencies treat environment does not end here. The officials also decided to plant saplings almost three months after the acknowledged

planting season was over. Most people know that saplings planted during the Delhi monsoon months of July and August have higher rates of survival. In essence, it was a senseless act that involved spending considerable money on JCBs and labor to destroy an existing forest.

A loud thought: if the same saplings had been planted elsewhere, maybe we would have two forests instead of one broken forest as the case is now.

Now we talk about the policy. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced transplantation of trees. This is a decision that has remained controversial for over a decade now. The results of tree transplantation over the past years have been anything but positive. The act involves considerably fanfare with photographs, and much money has been wasted on converting a living tree into a dead one, courtesy, transplanting fully-grown trees.

Once again Delhi environmentalists have raised a hue and cry. The act of transplantation is expensive and complex. Also, not all trees can be transplanted. A tree has to be assessed for the girth of its trunk, the depth of its roots and how big the tree is. Also to be taken into account is the species that has to be transplanted.

The cost of transplanting a tree also has a story. Depending on the size of a tree, the involvement of experts and how competent and serious the transplanting agency is, the cost can vary between Rs 15,000 to over a lakh for one tree. Agencies-private companies as well as government departments, have their own rates for this task which vary widely. However, nobody gives a guarantee that the tree will survive. At the very best of times, which happens but rarely, transplantations may be 50 per cent successful, or at the worst, the rate will be 5 per cent. A transplanted tree may take up to ten years to regain its lost canopy and green glory, if it survives.

What has to be considered seriously is whether the money spent on transplanting a tree can be put to better use by growing new plants instead? Does a city which remains on top of the charts globally for five years in air pollution still needs to relocate its trees out of the city? Can Delhi afford to have its city forests cleared with bulldozers? A naturally-gifted city like Delhi, with the Aravallis and the Yamuna, needs better policies and definitely better action.

Ideas and action driven by contractors will not work if the city has to be made clean and green, lovely and livable for its nearly 20 million people.

Source: <http://www.daijiworld.com/news/newsDisplay.aspx?newsID=762532>