

MANGALURU

Forest Department urged to transplant saplings

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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Environment activists on Monday urged the Forest Department to transplant (shifting and planting again at a different location) saplings that were recently planted by the department by the side of National Highway 169 between Mijar and Bikarnakatte, ahead of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) taking up the highway widening project.

The activists, Jeeth Milan Roach and Dinesh Holla, made this plea before the Forest Department officials when the latter called the former to show the 2,616 trees that have been identified for felling on the 18.5-km stretch between Mijar and Bikarnakatte.

This is part of the 45-km stretch between Sanoor (near Karkala of Udupi district) and Bikarnakatte that has been proposed for widening.

The Forest Department team, which was led by Range Forest Officer Prashant Pai and Deputy Range Forest Officer Sanjay, started showing the trees to the activists from Bikarnakatte market area. Representatives from the NHAI and the office of Special Land Acquisition Officer also joined the process.

The activists were taken in a vehicle for a distance to show other trees that included a few Banyans and Peepals. "Saplings that were recently planted by the Forest Department and are within 30 cm girth should be transplanted. Some of the Peepals and the Banyans that give good green cover should be saved," Mr. Roach said.

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari is in favour of tree transplantation and there should not be any problem in getting funds for this work, Mr. Roach said.

An official from NHA said that they will provide all necessary support to the Forest Department in transplanting trees/saplings. He said that a portion of the land acquired for road widening will be used for greening. Two horticulture experts will be involved in greening this portion, the official said.

Mr. Sanjay said that a report will be submitted to the Deputy Conservator of Forest Y.K. Dinesh Kumar giving the list of trees that can be transplanted. "We will make sincere efforts to save as many trees as possible," he said.

Heated exchange

Earlier, there was a heated exchange of words between the activists and local residents, including Padavu Central councillor Kishore Kottari and Kadri North councillor Shakila Kava, when the former opposed felling of trees.

Activist Eugene Lobo said that there is no need to remove every tree for widening the road. Mr. Holla said that heat is already increasing in Mangaluru and there is a need to preserve greenery. The Forest Department should make it clear where the compensatory greening will be done, he said.

Questioning the activists, local resident Prakash Shetty said that he is among those residents affected by heavy traffic flow on NH 169. "It takes a lot of time to even cross the road," he said.

Another resident said that accidents have increased and there is a need for widening the road. Mr. Kottari and Ms. Kava joined the local residents and said that the government is ensuring a fine balance between development and preserving greenery.

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