



Goa: Soon, get permission to cut trees online

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PANAJI: After the high court of Bombay at Goa expressed shock that tree authorities for North and South Goa had not met since their constitution in 2012, the authorities held a joint meeting based on court directives. A compliance report, as directed by the court, was filed, where it has been stated that the forest department is in the process of developing a dedicated online portal for applications seeking permissions for tree felling across Goa.

However, the state has told the court that it is not feasible to carry out a tree census in Goa as directed by the court, as it is a 'herculean' task and Goa's climate leads to dense vegetation growth within a short time. "Once the online portal is operational, the entire process of tree felling (permissions) will be online," it said.

Presently, the forest department on a regular basis is uploading the permissions granted for tree felling on the forest department's website," reads the compliance report submitted by member secretaries of the tree authorities, Santosh Fadte and Prem Kumar R.

In July, the high court had directed the state to comply with all provisions related to the duties of the tree authority under the Goa, Daman and Diu Preservation of Trees Act. The court was hearing a public interest litigation filed by Living Heritage Foundation, that had sought the revival of the tree authority and the carrying out of a tree census.

About the census, the tree authorities have said in the compliance report that the Forest Surveys of India, a body of the Union environment ministry, has already surveyed the forest and tree cover in Goa. As per the 2019 report, Goa's forest cover increased from 60.2% during the previous survey year to 60.4%.

"In order to plan and carry out a census of trees over an area of approximately 2,487sq km is a herculean and voluminous exercise, requiring a large number of technical/skilled manpower, logistics, IT equipment, funds etc," the compliance report reads.

If a census is taken up, it will be difficult to arrive at a fixed figure of trees as the growth of a tree is a continuous process, the report states.

"It will keep on changing after every year, and therefore the tree census shall have to be carried out at regular intervals, which is an enormous task in terms of time and resources. Further, climatic conditions of Goa facilitate quick growth of forest-like vegetation as it is a high rainfall zone," reads the report.

The Forest Survey of India already has records of trees outside of forest areas, the report states.

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