

Maharashtra: State tree authority set up, to decide on projects that need felling of 200 or more trees

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Almost seven months after amending the Maharashtra (Urban Areas) Protection and Preservation of Trees Act, 1975, the state government on Monday constituted the Maharashtra State Tree Authority and appointed a chairman and three members.

The tree authority will look into projects that would need the felling of more than 200 trees of five years old or more, among others.

As per the notification issued by the government on Monday, it has named the secretary (Environment and Climate Change) as the ex-officio chairman of the Maharashtra State Tree Authority. Secretaries of the urban development and forest departments have been appointed as ex-officio members. The director (Environment and Climate Change) will be the ex-officio member-secretary of the authority. Besides, Vishal H Raje has been nominated to the authority as a tree expert for one year.

The constitution of the state-level tree authority comes after the legislature last July passed an amendment to the Maharashtra (Urban Areas) Protection and Preservation of Trees Act, 1975, which was tabled by Environment Minister Aaditya Thackeray. Earlier, there was no such tree authority at the state level.

As per the new amendment, for any project that plans to fell at least 200 trees of five years old or more, the state authority is responsible for deciding on the applications referred to it by the local municipal tree authorities. Only after its sanction, the project will move forward.

The state tree authority is also tasked with monitoring the functioning of local tree authorities, protection and conservation of heritage trees (trees with estimated age of 50 years or more) and felling of heritage trees.

Officials said that the state authority will decide on holding a meeting soon. "The BMC tree authority has referred three proposals, which require permission for felling and transplant for Metro rail projects, to the state tree authority for approval," said an official.

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