

NGT tells forest dept, Pune collector to file response over compensatory plantation

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Pune: The National Green Tribunal's principal bench in New Delhi has directed the principal chief conservator of forests, the chief wildlife warden and Pune district collector to file responses on compensatory plantation in Mulshi, where a builder was recently fined Rs 8 lakh for chopping over 800 trees in the past eight years.

The responses have to be filed a week before the next hearing slated for July 19.

The bench of National Green Tribunal (NGT) chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava, judicial member Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi and expert member A. Senthil Vel, while taking suo motu cognisance of a media report, observed on May 20 that the matter indicated violation of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and the Environment Protection Act, 1986 and raised substantial issue relating to compliance of the environmental norms and implementation of the provisions of scheduled enactment.

“The news item reflects that the forest department has levied fine against the person responsible for illegal cutting of trees, but it does not reflect any action by the authorities for compensatory plantation and levy of environment compensation for causing damage to the environment,” the bench noted while impleading the three authorities as respondents in the matter and referring the case to the green tribunal's western region bench in Pune.

TOI in its April 13 edition this year had reported the matter. The Vasundhara Social Upliftment Tree Planting and Tree Conservation Cooperative Society in Mulshi had filed a complaint against the builder on March 7 this year, stating that over 400 trees planted by the society in 2016 as well as 400 naturally grown trees on its six hectares of land were felled by the developer in the last eight years.

The forest department on April 2 this year had imposed a fine of Rs8 lakh on the developer on the charge of felling 800 trees without administrative permission in Nere village of Mulshi taluka. When a notice was issued to the builder for further investigation, he reported to the forest area office at Bhare and recorded a statement before the range forest officer, admitting to the crime. A fine of Rs. 1,000 per tree under sections 3 and 8 of the Maharashtra Cutting of Trees (Regulation) Act, 1964 was levied on the person totalling up to Rs 8 lakh.

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