

Over 57 lakh saplings readied for the day

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Local bodies will plant 47 lakh saplings that have been distributed and pledge to stop the degradation of nature

KOCHI: After two consecutive years of devastating floods and a two-month-long nationwide lockdown that ruined the livelihood of the common man, it seems there is more awareness among the general public on protection of the environment. The social forestry offices across the state have been flooded with calls booking saplings for the past one week. And officials say they are unable to meet the demand. The state is on a tree-planting spree. Around 57.7 lakh saplings will be planted across the state during Vanamahotsavam, on Friday. Forest Minister P Raju will inaugurate the World Environment Day celebrations at Kudappanakunnu in Thiruvananthapuram at 9.30am. Programmes have been organised in all local bodies to plant trees pledging to stop the degradation of nature. As many as 47 lakh saplings have been distributed to local bodies.

“Environment Day is being observed at a time when we hang our heads in shame paying tributes to a pregnant elephant that met with a painful death after she chewed a fruit stuffed with crackers. It is time we took a pledge to show compassion to other living beings. The enthusiasm shown by the public in planting trees is gratifying. But we should also nurture saplings,” said Surendrakumar, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden.

The department raised the saplings in its nurseries across the state providing employment to daily wage earners under the MGNREGA scheme and ensuring a steady income for hundreds of workers during the lockdown days. As many as 20 lakh saplings are being distributed in the central region of which 5.6 lakh will be planted in Ernakulam district. As many as 4.30 lakh saplings will be planted in Thiruvananthapuram district.

“Based on the public demand, we raised saplings of fruit-bearing trees, medicinal plants, timber yielding and flowering species for riverbank stabilisation and sacred groves. Field staff, nursery watchers and attendants who raised the saplings strictly followed lockdown regulations, including social distancing, hand wash and other hygienic practices,” said C Meenakshi, conservator of Forests.

A special focus has been given in for distribution of rare, endangered and threatened tree species of Western Ghats. An innovative project called Vidhya Vanam has been unveiled to involve school children in the tree-planting drive. Two schools in each district have been selected for the project, she said. “We have raised 24.89 lakh saplings of fruit-bearing trees. Apart from this, 7.84 lakh medicinal plants and 5.78 lakh flowering trees are being distributed. Considering the huge demand for teak saplings we are providing teak stumps also,” said M K Renjith, Social Forestry department range officer.

HMT, Kalamassery has come forward to plant around 10,000 trees on the eight-acre land on its premises. Of the total 251 acres of land owned by HMT at Kalamassery, around 115 acres of vacant land has turned into a forest. The land has now become a haven for over 196 species of birds, both native and migratory.

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