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Short of manpower for task, MC outsources maintenance of trees

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Ludhiana: Unable to maintain the saplings that were planted before the rainy season, the municipal corporation has blamed staff crunch and hired a private contractor for the task.

Like every pre-monsoon period, a plantation campaign has been started in the city, but this time not only the plantation will be outsourced but also the maintenance of those plants will be in the private hands. This drive was to start in February but the assembly elections forced the MC to postpone it, and now at last it has resumed the preparations for it.

The MC plans to plant 15,083 saplings this year. In the first step of the project, the sites are being identified along the Buddha Nullah and the central verge of the Tajpur Road, which had been kept barren for a long time. The officials is planting at least 6-foot-tall saplings so that none of these dry out. Pits are being dug up on the roadside and the first saplings have been planted near Chand cinema along the Buddha Nullah.

The civic body's horticulture branch is under an acute staff crunch. It doesn't have enough lower-level workers to do the maintenance of the trees. For this reason, the officials have decided to hand over the task to a private contractor for two years. If the trees do not survive, the contractor will replace those. Additional MC commissioner Aaditya Dachalwal said: "These saplings were purchased under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and the private contractor will be fully responsible for the loss. Apart from the plants, we have also purchased tree guards to save the roadside saplings from being eaten by stray cattle."

An MC official said on the condition of anonymity that: "Earlier, there used to be a mad race for tree plantation in the city but nobody bothered about maintaining those plants. We have now reduced the number of planted saplings but laid more focus is on their survival. The corporation can grow thousands of plants in the rainy season if it has the infrastructure as well as manpower to nurture those."