

Telangana tops country in permitting tree-cutting

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HYDERABAD: At a time when climate change is increasingly under the spotlight, Telangana has topped the country in giving the number of permissions to cut trees. The state has allowed for the chopping of more than 12 lakh trees between 2016 and 2019, more than any other state during the period.

According to records of the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEF&CC), Telangana gave permissions to cut 12,12,753 trees. Even for 2018-19, Telangana gave more permissions to cut trees (5,22,242) than any other state. These permissions were granted against the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, which means these are records only at the national level.

The data was provided in Lok Sabha on Friday by Babul Supriyo, Union minister of state for MoEF&CC, in response to a question by B B Patil, TRS Lok Sabha MP from Zaheerabad. Supriyo said, "In the last three years, 76,72,337 number of trees were removed and plantation of more than 7,87,00,000 trees have been stipulated under compensatory afforestation."

He further said, "The trees are removed only when it is absolutely necessary. As a general policy, more trees are planted than number of trees approved for removal under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980."

State director, WWF, Hyderabad, Farida Tampal, said that the numbers indicate permissions granted for larger projects as approvals under FCA are given by the Centre.

Can't replace old trees with saplings'

Tampal, who is also a part of the Tree Protection Committee, said, "The TPC's jurisdiction is restricted to GHMC and Ranga Reddy district limits. Permissions for tree felling in other areas are approved by the respective district forest officers."

Activists, however, are not happy. Kajal Maheshwari of the Citizens for Hyderabad, said, "You cannot replace 30 to 40-year-old trees with saplings as is being done under the Haritha Haram. The loss of biodiversity is incalculable."

"The four-way national highway which was given approval through a forested corridor known for tiger migration is a classic example of how scant regard is being given to biodiversity by the state," said Subba Rao, former advisor, climate change, at Engineering Staff College of India. He added that the real estate boom in the city could be another reason for the loss of trees.

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