

Outlook

Covid delays 3rd-party audit of plantation drives by Delhi forest dept

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New Delhi, Jun 3 (PTI) A third-party audit of the plantation drives conducted by the Delhi forest department from 2016 to 2019 has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, officials said on Thursday.

The department had roped in Forest Research Institute, Dehradun, in April last year to conduct an audit of the saplings planted during the period to ascertain their survival rate.

"We have already submitted 50 per cent of the funds to FRI. They were supposed to start the exercise in October last year, but then COVID-19 cases started increasing in Delhi," a senior forest department official said.

"Later, FRI said the audit will begin in April, but the second wave of coronavirus hit the city," he said.

Of the 18 greening agencies involved in the plantation drive, the forest department and the Delhi Development Authority plant the maximum number of saplings and shrubs.

DDA has also asked FRI to conduct an audit of their plantation drive.

Various government agencies planted 32 lakh saplings in the financial year 2020-21. Of this, the forest department planted around 5.5 lakh saplings.

The government has set a target of planting 33 lakh saplings this financial year. It expects to increase the city's green cover to about 350 sq km this year from 325 sq km in 2019.

Environment Minister Gopal Rai had last year said the government would get an audit conducted by FRI, which will help ascertain which species of plants, trees and shrubs have the best survival rate in Delhi and which regions in the city are best suited for their growth.

The Delhi forest department had earlier got an audit conducted by the Agricultural Finance Corporation for the plantation drive carried out during 2013 to 2015.

Environment expert Vimlendu Jha said these plantation drives do not serve any purpose if you do not get to know which plant species survived at which location. Else, it's a complete waste of resources. PTI GVS RHL

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