

Forest area in Punjab rises by 2,872 acres, illegal encroachment removeds from 18,946 acres: Minister

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Chandigarh: Punjab forests minister Sadhu Singh Dharamsot on Monday said the state government had cleared illegal encroachment on 18,946 acres of forest area and forest area across the state has increased by 2,872 acres.

He said during 2017-18, 879 acres of forest land was cleared from encroachment, 1,688 acres in 2018-19, and 13,132 acres in 2019-20. As per the latest forest cover report released by the central government, the forest area of the state has increased by 2,872 acres, said the forests minister. Dharamsot said that the department planted over 77 lakh indigenous varieties of saplings in 12,986 villages and established 432 'Nanak Bagichis' with the cooperation of public to mark the 550th Parkash Purab of the first Sikh master, Guru Nanak Dev. To commemorate the 400th birth anniversary of Guru Teg Bahadur, 60 lakh saplings were planted in the state.

During the Congress regime in Punjab, saplings were planted on 34,988 acres under the 'Puncampa' scheme, said the minister. In four years, under the agroforestry scheme, a subsidy of Rs 10 crore for over 1.15 crore saplings has been transferred to the Aadhaar-linked bank accounts of 10,204 farmers.

Dharamsot said the department had proposed to plant saplings over 19,125 acres of land under the 'Puncampa' and 'Green India Mission' schemes in 2021-22 and the department would plant as many as 30 lakh saplings under the agro forestry scheme, besides distributing 15 lakh free of cost plants under the 'Ghar-Ghar Hariyali' scheme.

Regarding his social justice, empowerment and minorities department, Dharamsot said during 2020, as many as 10,873 girls belonging to scheduled castes had been given the benefit to the tune of Rs 22 crore under Ashirwad Scheme, while Rs 17 crore was disbursed to 8,209 girls from backward classes and economically weaker families at the time of their marriages.

He said that the Punjab government notified its own new BR Ambedkar SC post matric scholarship scheme on October 27, 2020, which had been applicable from the academic session 2020-21. Dharamsot said the state government was running three schemes in collaboration with the central government to extend benefit to students of minorities. These include pre-matric scholarship scheme, post-matric scholarship scheme and merit-cum-means based scholarship. During 2020, benefits to the tune of Rs 76.14 crore were extended to over 4.68 lakh students under pre-matric scholarship scheme, while under post-matric scholarship scheme 56,664 students got benefit of Rs 30.18 crore. Under the merit-cum-means based scholarship scheme, 2,404 students received scholarships worth Rs 6.45 crore through direct bank transfer (DBT) mode, he added.