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Over 600 trees will be axed in city for development; activists allege indiscriminate felling

## CHOPPING AWAY the green cover

Binoy Valsan | TNN

**T**he ongoing road widening works of the state highways department is taking a toll on the green cover in the city and suburbs as over 600 trees will be removed from the city's landscape during the implementation of the entire project. The state highways department has been granted permission from the forest and revenue departments to cut these trees as per the requirement of their proposal. "The permission has already been granted and the highways department is proceeding as per their proposal. They are removing trees and electric poles to widen these roads," said a senior revenue department official.

The widening works will be carried out on Thadagam Road from Government College of Technology to Edayaralayam covering a stretch of 3.5 kilometre at an estimated cost of Rs 2.64 crore. As many as 250 trees will be axed for the project to widen the road from the existing 6.5 metres to about 15 metres, making it a four lane road to ease the flow of traffic. The work is expected to begin soon.

"We have got the permission to cut the trees along Thadagam road and the widening works will be taken up on this stretch soon," said a senior state highways department. Similarly, more than 210 trees are under threat of being axed for the road widening works on Lawley Road-Marudhamalai stretch extending up to 3.6 km at an estimated cost of Rs 6.4 crore. Highways department officials say they have granted permission for cutting minimum number of trees required for the execution of the project. Officials had to face stiff resistance from green activists and a stay was obtained from the district court. Now, they are planning to approach higher courts to obtain legal reprieve in the matter. The total worth of the trees to be cut on this stretch is estimated to be about Rs 7.17 lakh.

"We have no other option but to remove these trees as per our proposal reports. We always try to explain this situation to green activists in the city," said another senior state highways official.

The highways department has also removed 42 trees along the Kavundampalayam-Onnapalayam stretch and also another 21 trees from Veerakeralam Road. Revenue department officials also claimed that the final go-ahead for the cutting of trees was given only after conducting field inspections of the proposed stretch where widening works is to be taken up.

However, green activists claimed that highways and other government departments were engaged in indiscriminate cutting of trees in the city and the outskirts. They also alleged that proper norms and procedures were not being followed and the trees were being cut in excess in the district.

"They are indiscriminately cutting trees in excess of what has been officially permitted. Proper inspection and preparing the estimate is also not being followed in the district," said M Yoganathan, green activist.

### Facing the axe

Number of trees to be cut in the city

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Thadagam road               | 250 |
| Marudhamalai road           | 210 |
| Veerakeralam Road           | 21  |
| Kavundampalayam-Onnapalayam | 42  |
| Telugupalayam               | 210 |

**A COLOSSAL WASTE:** Trees being axed in Marudhamalai Road as part of road widening project by the state highways department workers



Pics: A Lakshminarayanan



## Environmentalists put up a strong fight

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**E**ven as they face stiff resistance from the government departments and agencies, the green activists in the city had something to cheer for after the state forest minister KT Patchamalai said in the legislative assembly that the government was considering whether to enact the Tree Protection Act to protect the green cover in the state. He also added that a tree authority is being proposed to prevent the indiscriminate felling.

"We welcome the move as there should be some regulatory body with powers vested in it to ensure that green cover is protected. Often green activists are termed as anti development as most government officials involved in tree cutting claim that they are carrying out development works,"

said Mohammed Saleem, a city based green activist.

According to city environmentalists, more than 400 trees have been axed and removed from the city and suburbs over the past few years in the name of implementing various projects of the state government and city municipal corporation. The rift between the green activists and the city corporation flared up so much so that city mayor SM Velusamy recently got a special resolution passed in the corporation council to invoke criminal proceedings against green activists opposing the cutting of trees. The storm water drain project of the corporation is one project implemented by the local body that is being strongly opposed by green activists and residents in some parts of the city.

"The main issue is that most officials

are involved in the racket as they indiscriminately cut down trees and sell them off without following any of the procedures prescribed by the government," said M Yoganathan, another green activist in the city.

The green activists also added that the trees earmarked to be axed have to be identified and the forest department should be notified about it. Officials should inspect the tree, identify the species and make an estimate of the timber cost and also the revenue department should be informed to give its clearance. They also added that the tree authority should have a governing council in which local green activists are also included to ensure that it does not end up as a namesake government body without any actual powers to curb indiscriminate felling of trees.