

1 lakh trees chopped over 8 years for Metro, PWD projects in city

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New Delhi: Over one lakh trees were cut during 2006-2014 to make way for Delhi Metro and PWD projects, bringing down the city's green cover to 10% from the minimum desired level of 33%, a Delhi high court appointed amicus informed the court on Wednesday.

Stunned by the "magnitude" of trees cut for various projects, a bench of justices B D Ahmed and Sanjiv Sachdeva said it "certainly enabled air pollution to increase in Delhi". The court directed the state government, PWD, DDA and DMRC to file affidavits on the number of trees cut and number of trees planted in various areas of the capital in the past 15 years.

It gave time till April 24 to the authorities to also enlist steps taken till now to restore Delhi's green cover, which has depleted over the years due to rampant tree felling. "Amicus



File photo

TAKING STOCK: HC has asked the civic agencies to file affidavits

has focused his attention on the green cover of Delhi. Based on official record, as many as 48,200 trees have been cut by DMRC and 52,000 by PWD for infrastructure projects. There are proposals to cut more trees for future projects," the bench observed, saying it needs these figures from all the agencies so that it can verify how many trees were cut and whether trees were planted or not.

Presenting his report, ami-

cus Kailash Vasudev told the bench that according to records "the tree officer has granted permission to DMRC to cut 48,500 trees. In the last eight years, PWD has felled over 52,000 trees for development of flyovers and roads. Many of the trees were over 100 years of age". Vasudev also said that there are 26 notified forests in the city but very few are left because forest authorities allowed cutting of trees

around the Ridge.

"Future plans of Delhi Metro expansion threaten the water aquifers and remaining green cover which will destroy the environment," the amicus cautioned, pointing out that "Delhi has only 10.2% forest cover left till 2009, even though the Forests Act says that 30% is minimum."

Vasudev also told the court that as per his research, 10,500 people are dying in the city every year solely due to air pollution ailments. "Vehicular pollution has grown at alarming rates in India due to growing urbanization. Delhi has more vehicles than Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai put together," the report added.

The court couldn't hide its disappointment over the approach of the government authorities. It asked additional solicitor general Sanjay Jain to inform it on the next date about what action plan was devised, if any, in a meeting held by the environment ministry.