

Afforestation programme launched near Pahalgam



Jammu and Kashmir Governor N. N. Vohra with Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed launch an afforestation programme in Pahalgam on Sunday. PHOTO: NISSAR AHMAD

The Jammu and Kashmir government on Sunday launched a pilot afforestation programme, near the famous tourist resort of Pahalgam, with an aim to restore critically-degraded forests in the State.

In an effort aimed at eco-restoration of the degraded forests, Governor N. N. Vohra and Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed launched the pilot afforestation programme from Frislan area of Pahalgam in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, an official spokesman said.

Addressing a gathering here, the Chief Minister said his concern to revamp the State Forest Policy was to make people living in close proximity of forests equal partners in eco-restoration drives of the government, as they were the vital stakeholders.

“We must inculcate a sense of ownership amongst the villagers as forests provide sustenance to the people living close by,” he said.

Mr. Sayeed asked Forest Minister Bali Baghat to conceptualise a plan for creation of an enabling environment, whereby the people living in contiguity

of forests are made an integral part of any conservation initiative.

“The Forest Department must conceive a plan, with active involvement of Tourism Development authorities and Shri Amarnath Shrine Board for Sonamarg-Baltal-Pahalgam stretch to begin with,” he said, adding more steps should be taken for wayside plantations on the nearby picturesque Daksum-Warwan and Aharbal-Kongwattan stretches.

Mr. Sayeed said even the Amarnath pilgrims should be encouraged to plant saplings en route the holy cave to extend the forest cover and make the journey more enjoyable.

The government has launched this afforestation scheme on a pilot basis in both Kashmir and Jammu divisions, Mr Sayeed said.

He said in order to tap the full tourism potential of the vast natural forests, largely untouched by human interference, emphasis should be laid upon developing such areas under eco-tourism by providing camping facility, trekking, bird-watching and other nature-related activities.

Endorsing the Chief Minister's initiative to restore the degraded forests, the Governor favoured putting a regulatory mechanism in place that involves mountain community in the conservation and plantation drives.

“The mountain people are an intrinsic part of the forests. They should get their fair share of the forest wealth,” he said.

Mr. Vohra said the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board will take the responsibility of planting around 10 lakh saplings and fruit plants around Baltal, which would bind the soil together in an area where sliding causes widespread damage in rainy season.-PTI

Source: <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-otherstates/afforestation-programme-launched-near-pahalgam/article7778631.ece>