

Eye on moolah, State to raise Red Sanders

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HYDERABAD: The ongoing Telangana Haritha Haaram (THH) may well turn out to be a 'red goldmine' for the nascent Telugu state. With the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh virtually minting money from the sale of precious red sanders through international auctions, the Telangana government too wants to try its luck. The state government has proposed to introduce red sanders to select forest areas in Telangana and distribute the plants among the poor farmers. It will raise about 80 lakh seedlings of red sanders over the next three years. Forest officials argue that introduction of red sanders to Telangana forests will not only help in protection of this rare and endangered plant species from extinction but will also generate good revenue to the state government and the farmers. According to rough estimates, the wood from the proposed red sanders plantation will fetch about Rs 70,000 crore at current international prices after 16 years. Subject to official rules, farmers are free to sell red sanders in the open market. The focus is on Khammam, Medak, Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal and Nalgonda districts where the demand for red sanders from the farmers is high. Forest officials have so far raised two lakh saplings in Nalgonda district alone. "There is great demand for red sanders. Local farmers feel that there is big money in the precious wood. They have already taken up cultivation on a large scale. We will raise more saplings to meet the ever-growing demand,"

said Nalgonda divisional forest officer S Satyanarayana Rao.

Red sanders is naturally grown in the Seshachalam biosphere spread over Kadapa-Kurnool-Chittoor-Nellore region in AP. The wood, known for its bloody markings, has a huge demand in the international market. A few plants were introduced to Telangana 12 years ago on experimental basis. A number of commercial red sanders farms have come up in the state over the years. But this is the first time that the state government has taken up such a massive plantation of the red sanders.

"Telangana will soon turn into a second home for the highly endangered red sanders if the government succeeds in protecting the 80 lakh seedlings through proper care. Telangana may become the leading red sanders producing state in the country by overtaking AP. Though Seshachalam forest spreads over 4,755 sq km, its core area is only 750 sq km. The density of red sanders trees varies within the biosphere. Only about 23 per cent of the red sanders area is dense and the rest sparse. In contrast, if all goes well with the Telangana plantation drive, the total area under red sanders in the new state will be around 250 sq km," said a senior forest official.

Even as the Telangana government took up the 'mission red sanders', researchers from the Government College of Science at Saifabad in Hyderabad conducted DNA studies on the samples collected from the trees grown in Hyderabad and its surroundings, Nalgonda, Karimnagar and Khammam districts. They found that the trees grown in Hyderabad region were of better quality than the ones in other districts. Nalgonda trees too had quality DNA. Experts point out that Telangana soil is suitable for red sanders though the quality may not be as high as those in Seshachalam. The Deccan thorn scrub forests and central Deccan plateau dry deciduous forests are best suited for red sanders.

Source:

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