

Himachal Pradesh to go 'herbal' with massive plantation drive

Himachal Pradesh is going in for massive plantation of indigenous species, especially medicinal plants, to not just boost its depleting green cover but also transform the hill state into a herbal one.

The state authorities planted more than 1.5 million saplings on a single day Aug 3 last year. The government plans to plant around 12 million saplings of medicinal species this year by encouraging the people to take to the drive.

Saplings of more than 55 indigenous species like neem, banyan, jamun and peepal would be planted during the special drives, starting with the onset of monsoon, an official said.

'The aim of the plantation drive is not only to make the hill state herbal but is also an initiative to combat climate change,' Forest Minister J.P. Nadda told IANS.

'We intend to re-green 2,677 hectares this year,' he said.

The government has roped in the joint forest management committees, local people and the National Medicinal Plant Board for carrying out the plantation drives.

'For the regions below 4,500 feet, around 9,300 villages have been identified where people would be encouraged to plant pipal or banyan trees,' Nadda said.

Additional Chief Secretary Avay Shukla, who is associated with the programme, said the aim of such programmes was to motivate the common man to know the importance of commercially valuable species.

'Once the villagers start understanding its economic benefits, the programme would gain momentum,' he said.

During the last plantation campaign, the maximum demand from people was for saplings of the medicinal plant amla, he said, adding that 388,629 amla saplings were distributed.

Wild pomegranate (136,470 saplings), bhera (89,350), ritha (56,386) and harad (30,601) followed amla in popularity in the villages.

In the towns, aloe vera was the most popular as 26,328 saplings were distributed.

The state already has a quarter of its geographical area under forest cover.

The hill state is most vulnerable to climate change as the Himalayan glaciers have been retreating due to global warming.

The latest report of the Forest Survey of India has revealed that the area of the state's moderate dense forests - tree-cover ranging from 40 to 70 percent - has decreased from 7,883 sq km to 7,831 sq km, a reduction of 52 sq km.

However, the area under very dense forests - tree-cover in excess of 70 percent - has marginally

increased from 1,093 sq km to 1,097 sq km.

Vishal Gulati (© IANS / India eNews)