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Afforestation drive hits a roadblock

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CHENNAI: Lack of financial assistance and support from government departments has resulted in the urban afforestation programme being given the go-by in the current financial year.

Forest Department sources say in the last couple of years, the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) bore 75 per cent of the expenses with the State government providing the remaining cost. Utilising the funds, the Forest Department planted saplings. However, no funds were provided for maintaining the plants.

A senior Forest official says as far as the greening programme is concerned, the Chennai Corporation and Chennai Metropolitan Development Authority should provide financial assistance for implementing it. He says the department provides saplings at a nominal cost to private individuals who evince interest. Left without any funds in the current financial year, it has not raised saplings in its nurseries at Anna Nagar and Velachery.

Another official says there is an increased awareness of the need to plant saplings. But, in the absence of funds, the department is forced to say 'no' to tree lovers who approach its nurseries for saplings. On the condition of the 45,000 saplings planted during the last couple of years, the official says in many areas, particularly in the suburbs, resident welfare associations are providing care and attention.