

8W NEW LINK TO MEDIA

WPC PIL 14046/2022 FILED IN HON'BLE HIGH COURT OF ORISSA IN THE MATTER OF DAMAGE TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE BY CUTTING AGE OLD TREES FOR MLA COLONY IN BHUBANESWAR

**09 09 2022 ORISSA HIGH COURT SEEKS TREE CUTTING COST FOR NEW MLA COLONY PROJECT
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Orissa High Court seeks tree cutting cost for new MLA colony project

The dispute had surfaced with members of civil society groups staging protests and lodging a police complaint against the authorities for cutting trees.

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By Express News Service

CUTTACK: The controversy over the construction of a new MLA colony in Bhubaneswar has taken a new turn with the Orissa High Court directing authorities concerned to calculate the cost of the 870 trees that were felled for the project.

The dispute had surfaced with members of civil society groups staging protests and lodging a police complaint against the authorities for cutting trees. MPs, MLAs, retired bureaucrats, green activists and city residents had also launched agitation over the issue. The controversy reached the high court after city-based social activist Jayanti Das filed a PIL on the issue.

When the matter was taken up for hearing along with the State government's affidavit on Wednesday, petitioner counsel BK Ragada pointed out that though the cost of plantation as compensation for trees cut was submitted, the cost of trees felled had not been calculated. Ragada further submitted that in any event the calculation of cut trees can only be done by an expert body.

Additional government advocate DK Mohanty on his part stated that the government will study the Supreme Court guidelines and consider referring the issue of calculating the cost of the cut trees. Acknowledging the submissions, the division bench of Chief Justice S Muralidhar and Justice Chittaranjan Dash directed the State government to complete the exercise within four weeks and further file a supplementary affidavit indicating the cost of 870 trees cut in terms of worth as per expert body assessment.

The bench, while posting the next hearing in the matter to November 17 further ordered, "Additionally, the Court would like the State government to explain if there is any set of guidelines followed by the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), City Forest Division, Bhubaneswar for granting permission for cutting trees for the project."

As per the State government's affidavit, the DFO (City Forest Division), Bhubaneswar had accorded permission for conversion and disposal of 870 trees for utilisation of land for public work subject to plantation of 8,700 plants in the available space or to deposit `68 lakh as per plantation cost norm. Odisha Bridge Construction Corporation (OBCC) had already deposited the amount with the DFO.