

Protection of heritage trees in Maharashtra

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In news- The Maharashtra government is set to make amendments to the **Maharashtra (Urban Areas) Protection and Preservation of Trees Act of 1975**, to introduce provisions for the protection of 'heritage trees'.

More information-

- Under the proposed amendment, a **tree with an estimated age of 50 years or more** shall be defined as a heritage tree.
- It may belong to specific **species**, which will be **notified from time to time**.
- Experts believe that in addition to the age, the **Maharashtra state climate change department** will be implementing the Tree Act.
- **Maharashtra Tree Authority** in local civic bodies and councils will be formed which will take all decisions regarding the protection of trees.
- The local Tree Authority will have to ensure **tree census to be carried out every five years** along with counting of heritage trees.
- A proposal to cut more than 200 trees of age 5 years or more, will be referred to the state tree authority.
- The tree's age will determine the number of trees to be planted as part of the **compensatory plantation-** as per the amendment, the **number of trees planted will be equal to the age of the heritage tree that is cut**.
- The organization planting the compensation trees will also have to ensure the survival of the plantation for seven years and **geo-tag the trees**.
- Such plantations can be carried out either in the same plot or a common amenity plot.

- In case compensatory plantation is not possible, the tree feller has to pay **compensation for the economic valuation of the trees being felled** (the amount of oxygen that a tree releases into the environment should determine its economic value).
- The **fine for illegal felling of trees** from a maximum of **Rs 5,000 to Rs 1 lakh per tree**.