



Plant more trees, but first take care of existing ones

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Weekend thunderstorms saw several trees and electricity polls uprooted in Bengaluru | Pandarinath B

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BENGALURU: Two consecutive nights of thunderstorms that the city experienced could well have taught Bengalureans something: While 'Plant more trees' is a well-intended call, 'take care of the ones standing' would be more apt and important. Saturday and Sunday evening saw over 100 trees uprooted and about 820 branches falling, bringing about 150 electric poles and live wires down with them, and claiming the life of one unsuspecting man who tried to remove a huge fallen coconut frond from front of his house and came in contact with a live wire that came down with it. Several vehicles, too, were damaged.

Sunday and Monday morning displayed a city, whose greenery had been ripped apart by a hungry monster that had gone berserk the previous nights, besides sending several city areas into long hours of darkness. Experts point out that the very trees, which earned Bengaluru the sobriquet of 'Garden City', were the main culprits. But behind this lay the human factor — Bengalureans and the authorities who run the city themselves.

They say that the main reason for tree fall is: Without daily care, trees get diseased, the trunks become hollow, and roots weak. This results in the trees becoming top-heavy and easily cracking or getting uprooted during heavy winds, like in the Saturday and Sunday night thunderstorms. "Many people think trees can grow by themselves and do not require daily maintenance. That's not true. Every tree should be watered daily - from the oldest to youngest," said noted environmentalist A N Yellappa Reddy. Suresh Heblkar, noted environmentalist, said, "The city's planning only looks for infrastructure but forgets the trees."

'City planners look at infra, ignore trees'

Suresh Heblkar, noted environmentalist, said, "The city's planning only looks for infrastructure but forgets the trees. Infrastructure is planned depending on where it has to come. Similarly, even trees should be taken into consideration. We need more tree parks like we have Cubbon Park and Lalbagh. Trees there will not fall because they have been planted with proper scientific techniques and the parks are maintained and the trees watered daily. This apart, the ones who carry out tree plantation drives also should plant trees in the right places and take care of them every day."

Renowned environmentalist A N Yellappa Reddy said he noticed most trees becoming cancerous. "In order to advertise, people drill thousands of nails in trees. This kills trees. The tree is injured in the part where the nail is drilled, fungus sets inside the tree trunk, which then begins to get hollow and weak, making it easier to get uprooted." He said the fault was man-made. He said such trees need to be checked and cut before they fall, posing danger to man, machine and property.

Reddy said that laying underground optic fibre cables was another reason. The cables laid below ground make it difficult for tree roots to again grow strong. Dr T J Renuka Prasad, Professor of Geology at Bangalore University, said water content reduction was putting the lives of trees at stake. He said, "Due to asphaltting and cementing of roads, the water is not seeping through the ground and so the trees are not getting enough water. During November and December when the

trees start shedding leaves, the leaves would accumulate near the base of the tree, and would then provide manure to the tree. Natural manure is not available now with the burning of leaves.”

Need for tree census

Dr T V Ramachandra, Lead scientist at IISc’s Centre for Ecological Sciences’ Energy and Wetlands Research Group, said that an expert committee is required. “The major reason for weak trees is BBMP making cement pavements which choke the bottom of the tree; there is no root respiration, thus making roots weak and enabling the trees to get easily uprooted,” he said. Tree Doctor Vijay Nishanth stressed on tree census. “Tree census should be the priority. From the girth to the height to the age of the tree, everything is noted during the tree census. But the census has been put on hold. Rules should be brought in to ban the cementing around the trees.”

What DCF says M K Chola Raju, Deputy Conservator of Forest (DCF), said, “One of the reasons for the trees getting uprooted is development, wherein the trees do not get sufficient moisture and water content has reduced in the root system. We found that their root systems had completely weakened.”

Native trees the best

Native tree species that could save the city listed by environmentalists are: Neem, Honge, Champaka, Nerale, Saraka Indika (Ashoka tree), Anthocephalus Kadamba, Ficus, Audambar, Pongame Oil, Indian bael, Pongamia, Nerale, and Banyan.