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Infra projects in city are tearing apart green cover

By Meera Bhardwaj | Express News Service | Published: 24th May 2017 02:30 AM |

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BENGALURU: The IT hub of Bengaluru, once known as the Garden City, has witnessed an unprecedented loss of tree cover for a plethora of infrastructure projects. Not just the city, even the green belt in the peripheral regions has almost vanished.

Ever since the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government came to power in 2013, various amendments were brought in to the Karnataka Preservation of Trees Act, 1976, thereby diluting it. While NGOs, experts and organisations claim that over 50-60,000 trees have been lost in the four years, officials say they have not collated data on the number of trees felled.

One of the seven trees that was axed on 24th Main Road in JPNagar 1st Phase for a TenderSure project | nagaraja gadikal

With urbanisation as high as 125 per cent, various infrastructure projects like the Metro rail, flyovers and underpasses in the southern and eastern parts of the city, subways, skywalks, TenderSure and road-widening works have taken a massive toll on the verdant tree cover. Also, widening of highways has claimed thousands of trees.

Environmentalist and Bangalore Environment Trust chairman Dr Yellappa Reddy says about 50-60,000 trees have been lost in the last 4-5 years.

“Felling has been large-scale due to road widening in many parts of the city as also for Metro Rail Phases 1 & 2 on both government and private land. Thousands of trees have also been felled on 40,000 hectares of encroached land while there is no estimate of tree loss on footpaths.”

Reddy added, “We have seen destruction of heritage trees (150-200 years old) around Bengaluru while the gundutopu, mavinatopu, devarakadus, wooded areas are a thing of the past. Even if 50 per cent of our 900 city parks are converted to Tree Parks, a lot of our problems will be tackled.”

Leo Saldanha of Environment Support Group adds, “Phase 2 of the Metro project has seen the felling of 1,000-1,200 trees in violation of High Court orders. BMRCL has not complied with the court directions and the ritual of public hearings on tree felling for Metro has been a complete farce.”

IISc study sounds warning

As per studies done by TV Ramchandra and his team at the Energy and Wetlands Research Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences (2014), IISc, using satellite imagery, there were 1.5 million trees to support Bengaluru’s population of 9.5 million, indicating one tree for every seven people. This will make Bengaluru GHG-rich, water-scarce, non-resilient and unlivable, depriving city-dwellers of clean air, water and environment.