



Today's Supplement

[Sunday Herald](#)
[Sunday Spotlight](#)
[Foreign Panorama](#)
[Arts & Culture](#)
[Articulations](#)
[Entertainment](#)

[Today's Edition](#)
[Front Page](#)



News

[National](#)
[State](#)
[District](#)
[City](#)
[Business](#)
[Foreign](#)
[Sports](#)
[Edit Page](#)

Supplements

[Economy & Business](#)
[Metro Liè - Mon](#)
[Spectrum](#)
[Science & Technology](#)
[DH Avenues](#)
[Metro Liè - Thurs](#)
[Sportscene](#)
[DH Education](#)
[Living](#)
[She](#)
[Open Sesame](#)
[Metro Liè - Sat](#)
[Sunday Herald](#)
[Sunday Spotlight](#)
[Foreign Panorama](#)
[Fine Arts/Culture](#)
[Articulations](#)
[Entertainment](#)



[Deccan Herald](#) » [Sunday Herald](#) » Full Story

How green is my valley?

With its lush green landscape, Bangalore was once considered a pensioners' heaven. But the unchecked growth of this fastest growing city in Asia is robbing it of its green cover. Is Bangalore losing its trees at the altar of 'development'? S NANDA KUMAR takes a sober look at the various arguments and counter-arguments on the issue.

The sight of a stately tree being cut down disturbs many of us. When the thudding of the axe ceases, the remains haunt us, that unfathomable emotional feeling that leaves us feeling so helpless and frustrated, because something that took years to grow is gone in an instant. When a tree is causing danger to human lives, sure, it has to go. But are all trees cut down for this reason? We need to take a sober, unemotional look at the issue.

Anyone who has travelled around in India will admit that the term 'Garden City' certainly suits Bangalore. Compared to several other concrete jungles of the country, Bangalore certainly is green. One of the first things that any first-time visitor to Bangalore notices is the large number of trees in the City. On the other hand, whenever one looks at old pictures of the City, the drastic change that has taken place hits hard. "Change," you mutter to yourself, "is inevitable." Or words to that effect. Could it be that the term 'Garden City' is struggling to remain in place, in the face of rapid expansion?

Land developers have moved into Bangalore, and there are scores of high-rise buildings coming up all over, both concrete and glass towers of commerce as well as residential apartment complexes. And in many areas, few could resist the temptation of selling stately old bungalows with spacious gardens to developers for astronomical prices. Trees are the first casualties when land is taken over for building. Luckily, there are rules in place to check this: you cannot fell a tree without the go-ahead of the Forest Department. Before the Forest Department can issue permission for a tree to be felled, at least two saplings have to be planted first.

In Bangalore City, the Deputy Conservator of Forests (DCF), Urban Division, Mr Parameshwar is the Tree Officer. He is the chief custodian of the trees, in a manner of speaking, because the power of giving permission to fell a tree rests with him. He says he receives about 300 to 400 applications a month requesting permission to fell trees. "The number of trees maybe more or less, sometimes a certain applicant could ask permission to cut more than one tree, sometimes it could just be a large branch of a tree that is posing a risk to residents." A Range Forest Officer (RFO) is deputed to inspect each tree that the applicant has indicated, and then, after ensuring that at least two saplings are planted for the tree to be felled, permission is granted. So, in theory, the trees are safe. But the reality is that however well-meaning the rules might be, the Forest Department definitely does not have the manpower to monitor all the trees in the City.

Leo F Saldanha, Coordinator of the Environment Support Group (ESG) believes that there is an urgent need to update the rules of the Forest Department if Bangalore's tree cover is to be protected. "A Forest Officer cannot save every tree when land is sold. And the legal system that governs the protection of trees gives a great deal of arbitrariness to the Tree Officer. There is absolutely no public

Other Headlines

[How green is my valley? »](#)
[The great 'tree' of human life »](#)
[Reliving examples of old West »](#)
[In case you are planning to visit Goa... »](#)
[Forever, under the magical spell of the mangroves »](#)
[Preserving the tradition of American gold rush »](#)

Advertisements

[Deccan International School](#)

[Fathers Day Gifts](#)
[Flowers Delivery](#)
[Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, India Wide](#)

[Shaadi Matrimonials](#)

Reviews

[Book Reviews](#)
[Movie Reviews](#)
[Art Reviews](#)

Horoscope

[Weekly Horoscope](#)
[Year's Horoscope](#)

Previous Editions

[Yesterday's Edition Archives](#)

Others

[DH Cartoon](#)
[Sunday Soliloquies](#)
[Weather](#)
[About Us](#)
[Advertisement Details](#)
[Subscribe to Deccan Herald](#)

Send your Suggestions /
 Queries about the Website
 to the

[Webmaster](#)

For enquiries on
 advertisements & responses
 :

[Contact Us](#)

consultation that is worth talking about. The Forest Department does not have the wherewithal to go and inspect every tree that is to be cut. So, in many cases, the default option is to give a go-ahead to cut a tree. This is a system that needs to be changed. It is a big challenge to protect trees when land is poached for development and trees are cut.”

Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), the main agency responsible for identifying and acquiring land that would be converted into sites, maintains that every care is taken to see that new layouts have adequate green cover. Jaykar Jerome, Commissioner, BDA, says, “In our layouts, apart from the avenue trees that we plant, we also maintain 15 per cent of the land for parks. We have also done away with the old practice of having small parks all over. Instead, like in the Banashankari VI stage, we have earmarked the Forest Land plus 440 acres as a park. In Anjanapura layout, we have sixty acres of green cover. Nearly 4,000 saplings have been planted around lakes that we have rejuvenated, like Agara and Benniganahalli. Similarly, trees have been planted along the Outer and Inner Ring roads.”

When his attention was drawn to the concern expressed by environmentalists on the rapid growth of Bangalore and the loss of green cover, Mr Jerome cut in to say: “The City has grown, roads have to be widened, there is no alternative, trees have to be cut...It is the last option. If a flyover is required, when there is no option, we have to cut some trees. But you have to plant at least two for every one you cut, and we have been doing that scrupulously. What we definitely need to do is to not only maintain but improve the tree cover we have got. And that is best left to experts.” Mr Jerome takes great pains to make the point that the BDA has, for the first time, a full time forest officer of the rank of DCF on deputation.

Bangalore previously had a green belt zone clearly marked, something that came out of the efforts of the State Government in the eighties, called the Comprehensive Development Plan (CDP). Today the City's limits have gone far beyond the Green Belt, thanks to the accelerated growth of the City in terms of population and residential requirements. One of the first adverse impacts on Bangalore's green cover came in when the wetlands were taken over for 'development.' Along with the wetlands went the water courses. “Even though the tree cover increased in the eighties and nineties, in effect, we have not gained anything,” says Leo Saldanha.

While it is very clear that urgent steps must be taken to protect the little green cover that exists around Bangalore from being 'developed' into residential areas, another concern is the maintenance of the existing trees within city limits. The South West monsoon is setting in, and now is the time when BESCOM, Bangalore's Electricity Supply agency, begins its task of trimming trees that may cause damage to electrical lines during stormy weather.

BESCOM says it has acquired two 'ladder vans' at a cost of about Rs 7.5 lakh each exclusively for tree trimming and overhead line repair work. But the sight of the company's linemen pulling down potentially dangerous branches with nothing more than a long wooden pole with a sickle tied to it at one end as 'equipment' is a familiar one. This is not a trivial matter being blown up. The danger lies in the fact that unskilled, excessive trimming such as this could result in the tree's crown balance being upset, resulting in it toppling over in subsequent winds or squalls. Add to this the risk of fungal infection when the cut part is not treated or covered - the result could be the loss of the tree.

Mr Muniswamy, Director (Technical), BESCOM, has a more lasting solution to offer for Bangalore - underground cabling for distributing power. “We are very seriously considering going in for only underground cabling in new layouts. BDA will have to cooperate with us, because the cost of the sites will go up. The cost to convert existing overhead cabling to underground is about 1:5. If we can do it in the beginning stage it will be 1:4. This is in terms of money. In terms of oxygen per tree, the cost is priceless, it cannot be calculated. Then people can grow any kind of tree, how many ever they want

without the danger of overhead lines and constant need for trimming.” In the long run, this could allow the expanding City to have more green cover. The electric company would also save substantially on expensive repairs to transformers caused by falling branches and subsequent short-circuits.

The City has seen a massive influx of Information Technology (IT) Companies, a phenomenon that really caused the land ‘development’ and real estate boom. Thousands descended upon Bangalore to earn a living, and they had to find spaces to live. Enter the property developers and apartment builders. Exit green cover. To give them some credit, most top developers are at least making the right noises about ‘enchanted green spaces and lush trees.’ But the ratio of the green cover in the City versus concretised buildings and ‘heat islands’ could go horribly wrong. Companies like Infosys, as part of the Bangalore Agenda Task Force (BATF), have been in the forefront of civic campaigns. It seems only reasonable to hope that they would take the lead in a massive tree planting campaign.

Subramanya Shastry of ESG feels that IT techies and companies need to get more involved. Leo Saldanha has another point to make on the same lines. “The IT-type of campuses that are coming up are projecting a different type of Bangalore. If it was somewhere in large enclaves of their own, that is one thing, but it is coming everywhere, even into the City.”

Nandan Nilekani, CEO of Infosys disagrees. “That is not true. We are planting diverse trees on our campus, and we take every care to look at the eco-system and bio-diversity.”

Rather than engage in finger-pointing, it only seems sensible to assume that the way forward is for Bangalore’s inhabitants to come together and draw up a massive and comprehensive plan to protect and enhance the City’s green cover. This includes citizens, the State Government, agencies like the Forest Department, BESCOM, BMP, BDA, eco-groups, schools and colleges, and important players in the IT, bio-tech and other private sectors.

The builders and developers are here to stay. Bangalore will continue to rapidly expand. Its fine weather will continue to attract people to come in and make it their home. These are truths that cannot be wished away or reversed. The City’s charm is taking a severe beating, true, but walk out after just one good shower - it is green and beautiful - at least in some areas. Bangalore’s citizens love their plants, and will definitely make their voices heard when trees are felled. But love and nostalgia are not enough, nor are wistful conversations of the past over cups of hot, steaming filter coffee. We all need to sit up and do something to protect it from being lost forever. It is still not too late.

HELPLINE

Numbers to call when you see trees being cut, or, require urgent help for cutting a branch/tree that is posing danger to citizens:

Forest Department (Tree Officer): 2334 3464

Range Forest Office: 2334 3543

BESCOM: All Executive Engineers, Asst Executive Engineers of respective areas: (Land lines and mobile nos. available on their web site www.bescom.org)

BESCOM Central Complaints: 1917, 2226 7118, 2226 7119

BESCOM Chief Engineer (B’lore Metro Area Zone): Mr V M Chandre Gowda: 98442-45888, 22263176, Res: 2658 1901

Tree Line (coordinated by the Environment Support Group): 2653 4364



Copyright 2004, The Printers (Mysore) Private Ltd., 75, M.G. Road, Post Box No 5331, Bangalore - 560001
Tel: +91 (80) 25880000 Fax No. +91 (80) 25880523