

More trees uprooted in south Kolkata than in north, experts blame it on groundwater depletion

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KOLKATA: The Saturday squall, a preliminary survey by the civic body and NGOs found, caused more damage to greenery in south Kolkata than in the north. By a conservative estimate, 150 trees were uprooted across the city, more than 70% of which were in south Kolkata. Experts thought depletion of the water table is one of the reasons behind the rapid weakening of the root system of trees causing premature uprooting. “The depletion of water table is higher and faster in south. And as the water table falls, the upper crust gets extremely dry, leaving the root system weak and the tree vulnerable to infections and diseases. Such trees cannot withstand the violent gust of a squall of Saturday’s intensity,” said Bengal biodiversity board chairman H S Debnath.

One of the reasons for higher casualty of trees in south Kolkata, green activists said, could be the greater density in the south. “Apart from a few stretches, avenue trees are much less in north Kolkata. Lopsided trimming also skews the centre of gravity of a tree” said Pradeep Kakkar of People United for Better Living in Calcutta (PUBLIC).

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Green activist Bonani Kakkar blamed the random ‘contractor-driven’ plantation and the wrong choice of species. “Our focus should be on survival, not the counts. Against most construction projects, contractors plant trees shoddily – just by removing a couple of paver blocks. The plant is destined to die after a point when its roots hit the concrete beneath.”

Kolkata had the second-highest green cover loss – 30% – among all metro cities in the last decade, according to the latest ‘forest cover’ report. Cyclones were one of the reasons. Green cover is very important for the betterment of the city’s ambient air and climate resilience. It also help neutralize the heat island effect. Kolkata experienced the second-highest forest cover loss — after Ahmedabad, which saw a loss of 48% forest cover in the decade.

“The loss is quite abysmal, compared to Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Chennai, which have gained forest covers of 11%, 9%, 15%, and 26% in the same period,” said Ajay Mittal, Director, Climate Change, India, and South Asia, Earth Day Network. It is high time we recognize it and do the remedial measures like intensive plantation without wasting any time, he added.