

## Protecting trees is as important as development

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Trees have found their protectors and they included people ranging from very young to very old. A group of them, including children, college students, youth and senior citizens decided to hug the trees along the road on the Guirim-Porvorim stretch, to keep them from coming under the axe due to the road widening project that is being undertaken. The complaints of the people are that reckless cutting, digging and use of heavy-earth moving machines close to the roots of the trees, many of which are decades old, by the contractors for the project, is posing a serious environmental threat. The reasoning is that the destruction of the trees is hurting the biodiversity as the trees besides providing oxygen, are the nesting and breeding sites for birds, reptiles, insects, butterflies, bees and a wide range of biodiversity. The allegation is that some trees are being cut at night while others are being poisoned with acid. This is not the first time that activists have gone to this area to hug the trees in a Chipko style protest to save them from being felled. They had done it over two years ago, and the same green lovers have been forced to come out again. This is the second such movement in recent weeks to protect trees that are threatened by road widening works. In February, there was an online petition addressed to the Goa Public Works Department, and the Union Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways demanding that no highway should pass through the village of Colvale so that the 200-year-old trees on the proposed route that the road will take can be saved. The campaign that has been started by Designer Wendell Rodricks who later said he would take the matter up to Rashtrapati Bhawan for resolution. The trees still stand, but there has been no decision taken on that still. There is a battle to save the trees that are in danger of being felled and this movement is growing, with people of all ages and even from across the world, wherever there are Goans settled, as was seen by the signatures to the online petition, coming to rescue the trees. There is hope that the trees will stand, but, for every tree that has found itself a saviour, there are so many other trees that do not have any guardians to keep them from being felled. But for the movement to be successful, this requires the government to be responsive to the need of keeping the trees. Development cannot be stopped and the cutting of trees to make way for projects will therefore continue. The balance in nature, however, has to be restored by planting an adequate number of replacement saplings for every tree that is cut. There is today a long list of development projects from roads that are slated for widening, to buildings that are to be constructed, to industrial units that have to be built, and even for an airport that is being developed. The axe will fall, but just what are the authorities doing to reduce the number of trees being cut or to grow more trees? According to the green and heritage lovers, the coconut tree, which has been declared the State Tree, is a part of the heritage of the State and gives Goa its identity, hence it has to be saved. But, it is not just the coconut tree but all other species of trees too that have to be protected from the development axe as much as possible. While the NGOs and the activists will stand by the trees, it is finally the government that has to understand that protecting the trees is as important as development that has to take place.

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