

How concretisation is killing trees in Delhi

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Thousands of trees in Delhi are facing the death trap of concrete. Despite court orders and big talk by agencies like the Forest Department, the Public Works Department (PWD), Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and municipal corporations, trees in the national capital are left defenceless.

Although, after a 2013 court order banning concrete work near trees, the Forest department took action against a few such illegal structures in the capital, the situation more or less remains unchanged.

India Today TV has received information from various areas where construction activities around trees are still underway.

In the South Delhi's posh Meera Bagh area, construction work by the Delhi government's PWD department is underway around trees.

Several activists, including Bhavreen Malhotra Kandhari of Tree SOS, are raising their voices against violations of the court and NGT orders.

Bhavreen said, "We are complaining about an ongoing work by the PWD in Meera Bagh since February. But, still, we are just getting assurances from the Forest Department and nothing specific has been done to save trees."

According to the NGT order dated 23 April 2013, public authorities have the duty to ensure that there should not be any concrete structure within one metre of a tree. Public bodies have been mandated by the order to look after all the trees and to take due precaution in future so that no concrete or construction or repairing work is done at least within the one-metre radius of the trunk of trees.

The order had also asked the public bodies to remove all the signboards, names, advertisements, any kind of boards or signages, electric wires and high tension cables or otherwise from the trees. However, little has been done in this regard.



Despite NGT orders against any concrete work within one-metre range of a tree, such construction work has continued unabated in Delhi.

Verhaen Khanna, Founder, New Delhi Nature Society, while talking to India Today TV, recollected a recent instance when he contacted one of the senior South MCD staff about the concretisation around trees. The officer shockingly said that the concrete helps the trees to be protected rather than be destroyed.

Verhaen said that on August 31, this year, he found fresh concrete work within one metre of five healthy trees in Maharani Bagh. Highlighting that any such concrete work was in violation of the 2013 NGT order, Verhaen brought the South MCD's focus on to the issue.

"Concrete around trees causes the roots of the tree to become weak. Then the tree dries and dies or it falls due to compromised roots. Sometimes, the tree can fall on people or their property. The authorities should be fully responsible for all the damages caused by fallen trees since they have neglected to remove the cement and violated the Honourable National Green Tribunal order dated 23/04/2013," Verhaen said.

According to a public notice issued by Department of Forests and Wildlife dated 8 October 2015, "Concretisation around trees not only damages the trees, it is an offence under section 8 of Delhi preservation of trees act 1994 and will also amount to a violation of Hon'ble NGT orders. All civic agencies, government departments, RWAs may please ensure removal of all the signboards, names, advertisements, any kind of boards or signages, electric wires and high tension cables etc placed on trees within their jurisdiction/ control failing which a penalty of Rs 10,000 will be imposed upon them for causing damage to trees. The person/agency/firm/company etc whose advertisement or billboard etc is found on the trees shall also be prosecuted and/ or a penalty of Rs 10,000 imposed upon him."

Even NGT has taken cognizance of such violations from time to time. Several self-help groups and lawyers are associated with efforts to ban the concretization of trees says that it has an economic and commercial aspect and due to that by the time the agencies swing into the action, most of the damage is already done.

"The forest department is facing a manpower crisis. Only seven officers are looking after the protection of trees in a city as vast as Delhi. Therefore, in such cases when we approach department the action could not be taken immediately and in that crucial time the roots of trees get damaged," NGT lawyer Aditya Prasad said.

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