

Kolkata launches biggest operation to re-fix trees uprooted by cyclone Amphan

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A tree which was uprooted during cyclone Amphan in Kolkata being re-fixed.(Sourced Photo)

In a race against time, Kolkata has embarked on its biggest ever exercise to save trees that were uprooted by cyclone Amphan. Some of these trees, like the Baobab tree and the 'Mad' tree, are more than a century old.

The storm hit Kolkata with wind speed of up to 130 km per hour on May 20, uprooting around 15,000 trees in one evening. Out of the 500 trees identified for re-fixing, more than 50 have been re-fixed.

"This is the biggest ever replantation drive in Kolkata. We have identified at least 500 trees that can be replanted. More are being identified and would be fixed. This is over and above the 50,000 saplings that are being planted," said Debasis Kumar, former member mayor-in-council (parks and gardens) of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC).

The authorities had set up a committee comprising experts from the state pollution control board, state biodiversity board, Botanical Survey of India and an NGO to identify the trees that can be replanted and help in the drive.

Three weeks after the cyclone, time is now a vital factor to save the trees.

"But it's now a race against time, as the uprooted trees would not survive long and need to be fixed at the earliest. Meanwhile they need to be taken care of – the trunk has to be kept wet with water so that the tree doesn't dry and there should not be any water-logging near

the roots as this could lead to fungus attack,” said Arjan Basu Roy, founder of a NGO named Nature Mates, who has fixed more than 500 trees in the past few years after they got uprooted every time a cyclone or a storm hit the city.

It’s a very laborious process, experts said. The tree has to be straightened up with cranes, a huge ditch has to be dug, the branches have to be trimmed before the tree can be re-fixed. Fungicide needs to be applied. The tree then needs to be tied to adjacent trees or bamboo poles to hold it straight

“The task doesn’t end here. The tree needs to be covered with jute cloth to prevent loss of water through transpiration. If new shoots start sprouting manure has to be applied and it needs regular watering,” said SS Hamid, curator of the Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden.

The garden authorities will replant a 150-year-old Baobab tree, which stores several thousand litres of water and a century old ‘Mad’ tree on Wednesday. The Pterygota alata tree is called a ‘mad’ tree because no two leaves are identical.

What has buoyed the efforts is that new twigs have already started spouting in some of the trees that were fixed near Rabindra Sarobar – a National lake in south Kolkata - a week after the cyclone. More than 50 trees have been fixed near the lake and another 60 - 70 would be replanted in the next few days.

“Replanting each tree would cost Rs 15,000 – Rs 20,000. Experts said that around 70% of the trees survive after replantation if the root condition is good and the replanted tree is taken care off,” said S Nandi, superintending engineer of Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority, custodian of two large lakes in Kolkata including Rabindra Sarobar Lake.

Source: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/kolkata-launches-biggest-operation-to-refix-trees-uprooted-by-cyclone-amphan/story-pytKdYuOWbQsgSQIG2XyuJ.html>