Telangana 🕮 Today

Suspected 'die-back disease' outbreak hits neem trees in Telangana

13 December 2022

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Hyderabad: Neem trees across the state are wilting and many drying up in what is suspected to be an outbreak of a fungus suspected to cause 'die-back disease', causing dismay and triggering an alarm among people.

Agricultural scientists, however, assure that there was nothing to worry and are confident that the impact of the fungus would diminish on its own thereby leading to rejuvenation of the trees. Scientists are busy trying to establish whether the ongoing wilting and drying was indeed die-back disease. But they advised people not to chop off the trees believing them to be dead as there is every possibility of the trees rejuvenating themselves. They also cautioned against using any pesticides and fungicides to check the ongoing wilting.

Last year, a similar infection was reported from several parts in the State. <u>Professor Jayashankar</u> <u>Telangana State Agriculture University (PJTSAU)</u> has now constituted a Special Committee to inspect, assess the situation and initiate measures accordingly. The Committee has already inspected several areas, including the Agricultural Research Institute in Rajendranagar in September, where a high incidence of infection in Neem trees was noticed.

This apart, many areas in Rangareddy, Sangareddy, Wanaparthy, Gadwal, Nagar Kurnool, Karminagar, Warangal and other districts have been inspected and mapping is being taken up extensively to create awareness among farmers.

Scientists say there could be different reasons, including excess rainfall and high humidity during August and September leading to this problem. The infected neem plants showed different symptoms like complete wilting, drying of entire tree, drying of twigs and gummosis, Professor Jagadeeshwar from PJTSAU said.

Soil samples, young twigs, stems, bark etc were collected from the infected trees and were examined microscopically in September. It was observed alpha and beta conidia of Phomopsis Azadirachtae and Fusarium conidia (Macro conidia) were the causative factors for wilting, drying and die-back symptoms in neem trees, he explained.

The fungus does not pose any threat to humans or livestock. Fresh leaves, twigs and other parts of the infected tree can be used for different purposes, he said.

Generally, spraying of Carbendazim or application of Mancozeb Carbendazim on the affected parts, spray application of Thiamethaxom or Acetamaprid is taken up to reduce the incidence. However, spraying chemicals to control the spread of infection could be harmful. Chemical residues on leaves could be consumed by cattle and it could be harmful to them. Similarly, the chemicals could also pollute the nearby water bodies and drinking such water could also be harmful, he added, stressing that neem trees rejuvenate themselves.

While protecting huge trees from fungus infection could be practically challenging, experts emphasize on protecting the saplings in Haritha Haram nurseries. A coordinated effort by horticulture, forest and municipal administration was required to this effect, they said.