

Green respite: bar on concrete around trees

SUBHAJOY ROY

Calcutta: The municipal corporation has decided not to use concrete around trees on the city's footpaths and demolish those that have left no breathing space around plantations. Rampant use of concrete has been blamed for trees getting uprooted during storms.

Metro had reported on several occasions how concrete leads to weakening and death of trees.

At a meeting held last week in the presence of senior engineers and officials of the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC), it was decided that the civic body would not allow use of concrete around trees. The meeting also decided to remove concrete around plantations if it affected the health of trees, a senior official of the CMC said.

Environment activists and naturalists have for long protested against the use of concrete around trees. They said concrete was being used randomly around trees. "In some places, a square or rectangular-shaped wall is built around the trunk of a tree. It is filled with 2 to 2.5 ft of soil," said environment activist Bonani Kakkar.

She said that the soil was of no help. "The roots grow at the base. What is the use of dumping so much soil around the trunk? The portion of the trunk that doesn't get air and sunlight because of the soil around it rots with time. The rotten trunk gets weak and it easily topples during storm or dies a natural death," she added.

Several trees on footpaths along Jawaharlal Nehru Road have such elevated boundaries that hide a portion of the trunk.

At the crossing of Ho Chi Minh Sarani and Little Russel Street, the situation is worse.

A wall barricade has left no space even on the surface. The 2.5 ft deep soil is covered with tiles and there is no scope for rainwater to seep in or air and sunlight reach the trunk. Such barricades can also be found near the southern end of the Park Street flyover.

Kakkar, the founder of People United for Better Living in Calcutta (PUBLIC), said



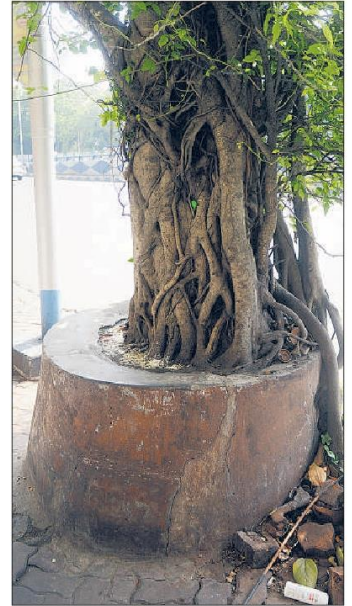
The roots of a tree covered with paver blocks on the footpath near American Center



Trees on the footpaths along J.L. Nehru Road with walls around its trunk near (left) Jeevandeep and (above) Citibank. Pictures by Biswajit Dutta



A tree at Nandan sealed with concrete slabs around its base



A trunk of a tree on a Chowringhee footpath barricaded with concrete

Jailed in concrete, tree roots give way



A report published in Metro on April 19, 2018, highlights the perils of using concrete around trees

she had raised her objections with the CMC about 18 months ago. "Civic officials admitted that these wall barricades around tree trunks were built without the corporation's permission. Even then they have not demolished the structures in over a year's time," she said.

In many cases concrete is used around the base of trees. Naturalist Arjan Basu

Roy, who founded NGO Nature Mates, said that about 3.5 ft of space should be left free around the base of a tree.

"This would allow the tree's surface roots to spread. Concrete should be used about 3.5 ft away from the base. This is called edging. It leaves space around a tree and also keeps the footpath in good condition for pedestrians," he

said. Paver blocks on footpaths blocking the surface roots of trees is a very common sight at many places, including Ballygunge Circular Road, Gurusaday Road and Jawaharlal Nehru Road.

A senior CMC engineer said the corporation was practising "edging" method for a long time. Sufficient space is

left free around the base and a wall of single bricks is built around the base.

"It prevents the sand under the paver blocks from flowing towards the tree base and keeps the footpath strong. At the same time, it leaves adequate space for the tree's roots to spread," he said.

Almost every storm that blows through the city uproots

several trees. Seventeen trees were uprooted in Calcutta and Salt Lake during a thunderstorm on February 25. Branches of another 31 trees also broke and fell.

The highest wind speed during the February 25 storm was 88 mph. Trees toppled on Heysham Road (Bhowanipore) and Bagbazar Street, in Golf Green and Hindustan

Park, and near Lake Kalibari on Southern Avenue, Santoshpur lake and at the intersection of Baker Road and Belvedere Road in Alipore.

Fourteen trees were uprooted or their branches fell on the road early on Saturday when a weakened Cyclone Fani blew over the city clocking a maximum wind speed of 52 kmph.