

Demolish concrete structures at base of trees, orders HC

Pics: Debabrata Shome & Biplob Bhattacharjee

Asks KMC To Take Cop Help In Case Of Threats

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Kolkata: Demolish the concrete base built around trees by the city roads so that the roots could access water, soil and air, ordered the Calcutta High Court on Friday. The division bench of Chief Justice T B N Radhakrishnan and Justice Arijit Banerjee of the HC asked the Kolkata Municipal Corporation commissioner to furnish an action-taken report by August and directed the civic body to take help of the police in case they faced threats during the drive.

Times View

It is an undisputed fact that any constriction around the roots can damage a tree's health. It is also unfortunate that we need a court order to state the obvious. But, now that it is there, we hope that things will be set right within the court-stipulated deadline.

Reprimanding corporate entities, which sponsored the concretization and stuck their logos onto the structures, the bench asked how could they act in such a high-handed manner. When one of the companies, the brand name of which was found on the tiles at the base of trees, was asked to explain the move, the counsel for the firm claimed they carried out the construction, in concurrence with the civic body. But the KMC counsel said no such permission was ever granted to any agency.

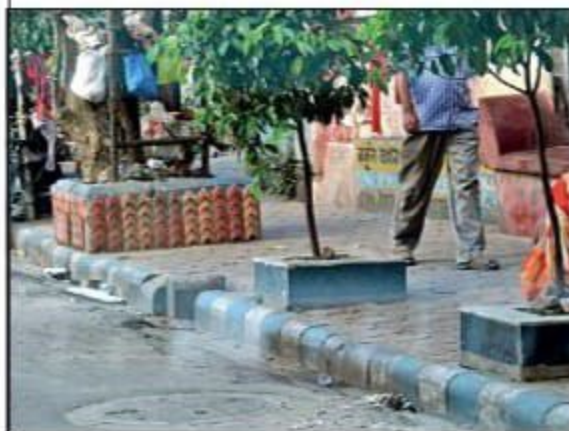
The order came close on the heels of a similar order that National Green Tribunal passed in mid-June against concretization of trees in Delhi. The Cal-

URBAN GREENING GUIDELINES

- ▶ 1.2mX1.2m around a tree has to be left clear during the tiling of pavements to allow growth of roots
- ▶ No structure can be built around a tree that hinders its growth
- ▶ Beyond the 1.2m, permeable paver blocks must be used to allow the root system to grow, breathe and draw water from the ground
- ▶ Impermeable materials should be avoided to allow groundwater recharging
- ▶ Mandatory space should be left on the side of pavements so that rainwater can seep in, allowing trees to access water

How It Harms

- ▶ A concrete base of a tree throttles the root system
- ▶ A weak root system makes a tree vulnerable to storms
- ▶ It also weakens the stem and makes it prone to termite attack, leading to the possibility of the trunk snapping from the middle
- ▶ People start hawking fares or sit on the base, forcing pedestrians to walk on the carriageway



Paved structures at the base of trees at Rashbehari connector (top) and Bakul Bagan

Roads with tiled structures around trees

- ▶ Theatre Road
- ▶ Russel Street
- ▶ Middleton Street
- ▶ J L Nehru Road
- ▶ Rashbehari Connector
- ▶ Ballygunge Circular Rd
- ▶ Southern Avenue
- ▶ Ho Chi Minh Sarani

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No sanction issued to pave tree bases: KMC

RESTRICTED DEVELOPMENT

The Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) has issued a notice to the contractor of the Rashbehari Connector road, asking them to remove the concrete structures built around trees at the base of the road. The notice states that the concrete structures are illegal and violate the Urban Greening Guidelines, 2014. The contractor is given 15 days to remove the structures. The KMC has also issued a notice to the contractor of the Bakul Bagan road, asking them to remove the concrete structures built around trees at the base of the road. The notice states that the concrete structures are illegal and violate the Urban Greening Guidelines, 2014. The contractor is given 15 days to remove the structures.

cutta HC gave the order following a writ petition filed on May 24 by Pradeep Kakkar, founder member of environment activist group People United for Better Living in Calcutta (PUBLIC), seeking the demolition of the concrete structures around the base of trees that choke the green giants to death. He also sought prevention of any kind of construction around trees in future. Kakkar also wanted all the authorities concerned to comply with the Urban Greening Guidelines, 2014, in connection with construction of structures and concretization of pavements.

The organization filed the writ after

a large number of roadside trees uprooted in squalls during the summer this year. Many of the trees that fell were found to have had withered owing to weak root and trunks as they could not draw nutrition from the ground, owing to the concretized base, the organization said. These concrete structures—carrying brand names of companies sponsoring the paving—made of non-permeable materials, like glaze tiles, reportedly prevented the proper functioning of the root system. In Kolkata, there is hardly any tree that gets proper space at the base that allowed them to grow.

“These structures are not only dest-

roying the city's already-dwindling green cover, but are also putting pedestrians' safety at risk,” said advocate Ritu-parna Chatterjee, who fights environmental cases and assisted Kakkar in the argument. “Once a concrete structure is built around the base of a tree, people set up temporary tea stalls and start hawking fares around there, forcing pedestrians to walk on the carriageway, leading to the possibility of accidents.” The premise on which Kakkar built his argument was violation of Urban Greening Guidelines, 2014, a set of thumbrules for urban landscaping and sapling planting.