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To keep Ahmedabad in pink, paint it green

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AHMEDABAD: The fast diminishing green cover has now left Ahmedabad gasping for breath. A recent study undertaken by Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc), IIT-Kharagpur and Isro revealed that though the city's built-up area grew by 132% between 1990 and 2010, at the same time the city's tree cover fell from 46% to 24%, which is dismally low and a dangerous trend too.

If this trend continues, by 2030 gen-next will be left with just 3% of the existing tree population. The study was conducted by IISc's T V Ramachandra, Vinay Shivamurthy, and Niranjana Joshi and Dr Bharath Aithal of IIT-Kharagpur.

According to the study, cities across India, including Ahmedabad, will grow over two times the current rate by 2030, which will only lead to more trees being sacrificed in the name of development. "In most of the cities, urbanisation was primarily due to infilling, followed by development along highways and arterial roads. Major drivers of land use change were observed to be industries followed by roads, educational institutes and transportation sector," claims the study.

"We never recognize trees as green infrastructure. Our town planning maps and even road line maps do not have trees marked on them. So, whenever road expansion or infrastructure development takes place, trees become first casualties," said environmental educator and CEE founder director, Kartikeya Sarabhai.

He adds, "At least old trees should be marked as 'heritage' on urban planning maps." Another naturalist Haseeb Sheikh told TOI that the problem was that the concept of greening generally involves ornamental plants. "What people don't realize is that there are hundreds of endemic tree varieties that should be planted and which will survive. This will attract 18 varieties of city birds, insects and various other life forms that are suited to Indian climate."

Ahmedabad currently has just 2% green cover and the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) ambitiously plans to increase it to 15%.

As part of its plans, AMC has started developing existing water bodies and open pockets as green spaces; like the Vastrapur Lake, but that too has become a losing ground. Another stark fact is that most water bodies in the city are located on the eastern part while in the western part AMC planned green belts like tree plantations along Nehrunagar-Shivranjani Road, which is yet to bear results.