

PILLARS OF NO HOPE: GREEN IS NOT GROWING ON THE CITY

By Kumaran P, Bangalore Mirror Bureau | Updated: Nov 27, 2017, 04.00 AM IST



Poor maintenance is one reason; theft is another. Experts say the idea itself is not viable in Bengaluru

When BBMP set out with the concept of vertical garden for Bengaluru, it seemed only right that a city that is expanding vertically should have its precious vegetation follow suit. But even only months later, the flaw in the plan is obvious. The plants are withering – and poor maintenance is only one of the problems, say experts.

These vertical gardens were set up in various places – along the Metro pillars near MG road, flyover at the Yeshwanthpur junction, and the elevated flyover on Hosur Road.

The BBMP has spent Rs 7 lakh at least on the project in Yeshwanthpur, the contract for which was given to a private vendor. The local corporator even arranged for a pump to water the plants regularly. But, nothing has worked.

"There has been some technical problem with the pumping system. The pipes are probably blocked. This is why the plants are not being watered properly," says N Jayapal, BBMP corporator of Ward 45.

The corporator said he was getting the issue fixed. But then there is another problem. "Some of the pots at the bottom of the pillar are being stolen. We do not understand why. Poor maintenance is one reason; theft is another. Experts say the idea itself is not viable in Bengaluru. People would steal these plants," he says.

'AGAINST NATURE'

Some of the environmentalists, meanwhile, have another explanation for why this is a bad idea.

Kailash Murthy, natural farming expert, said: "These vertical gardens are against nature. These plants require maintenance and every day, need to be watered, and the soil should be changed often. Moreover, these are domestic plants and that is a major reason why they need 'human touch'."

"The oxygen that comes out of these plants is expensive. You have to invest in the pillars, water, pumping machines, pots and daily maintenance. It is, in fact, more expensive than the oxygen that comes from trees that we plant. These are not economically viable. We should seriously look into this before investing anymore," he added.

Soil microbes die

Murthy says: "When you expose these domestic plants to the sun, the microbes and organic matter in the soil die quickly. Even the water gets evaporated soon in the pots. We are not able to maintain the aerobic and anaerobic system of the plants. This is becoming a showpiece at the end of the day."



'Not suitable for our city'

Environmentalist Vijay Nishanth says he's been saying from the beginning that it's not a viable option. "This is not suitable for us. It is expensive and it was done in Canada. Our roads are too hot for these plants. Why are we spending so much money on this," he asks.

"We do not have a suitable temperature for that. We need to maintain the temperature of these kinds of plants and someone should water them regularly. Who is there to do it? Instead, do some plantation on the soil and make them grow. The time you and money you shell out here and can easily be done," he added.

Environmentalist Suresh Heblikar points at priorities. "First of all, the city's normal vegetation itself is at risk and the reasons are very well known; right from the laying of roads to building high-rises, this kind of urbanisation doesn't even allow normal vegetation to grow. How can you expect these vertical gardens to survive then," he questions. Heblikar says instead of blindly trying to copy a concept from another country, Bengaluru should focus on what works here – which is plants with broad leaves that can better absorb CO2.

Experts also say that trees such as ficus will help foster biodiversity.



A WASTED EFFORT Vertical garden didn't work on this MG Road pillar as plants were either being stolen or were dying

Then there is grease

Yellapa Reddy, environmentalist, says: "These vertical gardens need care. There is continuous emission of soot and grease from automobiles and these settle on the leaves. They cannot release oxygen and, hence, they die. It is as simple as that."

So then why don't the other plants die too, you ask? "This is because these plants are under the flyover, without proper sunlight or air circulation," he explains.

Just aesthetics

TV Ramachandra, environment expert from Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Sciences (IISc), Bengaluru, says investing in plants that grow on the ground is a better idea because this helps in the recharge of groundwater. The idea of vertical garden is, of course, only for aesthetic beauty.

But then he adds: "It's human nature to criticise. Perhaps we can appreciate that people are doing this because they cannot maintain trees. May be we should just be happy with this aesthetic beauty at least."

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