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150 trees cut for MEGA on Navajivan Press Road

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AHMEDABAD: The Ahmedabad-Gandhinagar Metro Rail project has already resulted in cutting of 900 trees while another 600 are waiting to be chopped. The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) had given permission for cutting of 2,198 trees; of these, the AMC plans to save around 600 by transplanting them.

On Thursday and Friday, a total of around 150 trees along the metro route near Navjivan Press were cut down. Officials said that last year, when Metrorail Express for Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad (MEGA) tenders were floated for the 32.92 km elevated corridor running North to South (from APMC Vasna to Motera) and West to East from Thaltej to Vastrapur), conditions were laid for cutting of trees. But later it was decided to save

the trees situated along the railway line passing through the Navajivan publication area. The reason given was that there were no utility lines passing through this area.

GREENERY AXED

Status of tree cover in Ahmedabad

Zone	Number of Trees
Central zone	23,518
East zone	75,497
West zone	84,035
North zone	60,677
South zone	89,863
New west zone	84,189
Parks and garden	25,290
Cantonment & Other areas	174,979
Total	618,048

However, in the last two days, 150 trees have been cut and many others are waiting to be axed. Jignesh Patel, director of Parks and Garden, said the AMC had given permission to cut, in all, 2198 trees. Of these, 600 would be saved by transplanting them to other places. Striking an optimistic note, he said that effectively only around 1,600 trees will be cut for the 32.92 km elevated corridor.

Patel further said that of the 600 trees that will be transplanted, around 245 have already been transplanted in Nava Vadaj area and another 24 are in the process of being transplanted in Gujarat University ground.

When contacted, municipal commissioner Mukesh Kumar said that the AMC is making every effort to save the trees. "Only those trees that cannot be transplanted are being axed," Kumar said.

Patel said that not all the trees can be saved. Those trees that had a girth of more than 90 cm cannot be transplanted and hence they have to be cut. Further those trees that are near any utility lines like drainage, drinking water, power or gas lines cannot be translocated as the process of shifting the tree can damage these utility lines.

A senior officer of the forest department, however, said that the AMC is adopting a shortcut method for cutting trees. He admitted that trees beyond 90 cm girth cannot be transplanted with a machine that the AMC had acquired from the forest department. But he said that the Metro elevated corridor only comes up in the area where there are no utility lines in the vicinity.

He further said that last year some, 100 trees were transplanted from the area near Navajivan publishing house. "Then why were the 150 trees cut on Thursday?" the officer said.

Vanishing greenery

A recent study by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, says that Ahmedabad's tree cover had fallen from 46% to 24% over the last 20 years. In the same period, the city's built-up area had increased by 132%. The study predicts that by 2030, the vegetation cover will go down to 3% of Ahmedabad's area.

According to the 2010 urban tree count, Ahmedabad city has 6.18 lakh trees over 46,985 hectares of the city area. If about 282 trees are taken as green cover on one hectare, the city's tree cover is estimated at 4.66 % of the geographical area. This is below the average tree cover in urban areas in the state.

Transplanting a tree

During transplantation, a trench is dug around a full-grown tree's base which is 850mm in girth or more. The tree is then pulled out with a crane. The root part (ball) is covered with wet husk or resin cloth. The tree is then shifted to a new location on a flatbed trailer.

First, a part of the tree's root system is dug out from one side of the tree. Botanists or tree plantation experts first apply medicines to exposed roots so that the tree doesn't catch the infection.

After 10 to 15 days, the other half of the root system is dug out. After a few days, some branches of the tree are pruned so that it generates less food and also loses weight. Then the entire tree is lifted using the transplantation machine and transported to a new pit, which has minerals and medicines.