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Trees dying, nobody to look at

Over 200 die, 250 await death on 30km of two highways

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A large number of trees beside two highways in Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila remain vulnerable to death and looting, thanks to the negligence of the authorities concerned. The photo was taken from Sylhet-Comilla highway at Sultanpur in Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila a few days ago.

PHOTO: STAR

Valuable trees including shishu, mahogany, koroi, sheel koroi, and eucalyptus beside two highways in the district are dying amid lack of proper care by the authorities concerned. Social Forestry Nursery Training Centre (SFNTC) in Brahmanbaria is responsible for maintenance of the trees beside about 30 kilometres road from Ashuganj to Khatihata on Dhaka-Sylhet Highway and Khatihata to Kuti on Sylhet-Comilla Highway in the district but the officials hardly visit the spots, said locals.

Already over 200 trees have died and over 250 more are heading to death due to infestation with woodworm or people's callous acts.

A kind of disease affects some branches including the upper part of the trees first and then it spreads downwards, said local farmers.

In some cases, the leaves of the trees get yellowish and buds get covered with white spots, they said.

A section of unscrupulous people often cut down the tree branches and bark off the trunk, pushing the trees to virtual death.

Sometimes soil from the bottom of the trees is removed to make ways for tractor to easily go to the fields, locals said.

During this correspondent's visit to the SFNTC office at Medda in Brahmanbaria, the officials could not give any statistics regarding the number of trees on the both sides of the highway from Ashuganj to Kuti or tell how many of the trees died.

"This office is yet to record the number of trees including the healthy, affected and dead ones on both sides of the two highways. I assume that the number of the trees here would be around 5000 and over 200 trees have died during the last few years. I sent samples from affected trees to the laboratory to detect the cause of the disease," said Bolai Chandra Nath, forester of Brahmanbaria. "Climatic change, setting up of numerous brick fields and boiler-based rice mills and the discharge of seriously contaminated water from industrial areas have led to the death of trees here," he said. Meanwhile, the authorities are yet to take any step to remove or sell in auction the dead and dying trees. As a result, their wood is getting damaged by sun and rain and the wood worms that also affect the healthy trees nearby.

When contacted, Md Abdul Malek, the officer in charge of Brahmanbaria Social Forestry Nursery Training Centre, said, "I cannot cope with the situation due to lack of sufficient manpower at my office. I have sent samples of the affected trees to the higher authorities to identify the causes of disease. I have also asked for permission from the deputy commissioner's office for auctioning off the dead trees."

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