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- Horse Racing
- t2
- Opinion

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- Jobs Tue
- You Thu
- Howrah Fri
- Salt Lake Fri
- 7days Sun
- Graphiti Sun

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- Sudoku New
- Crossword
- Jumble
- Gallery

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Green team's gift of life

- Uprooted *bakshobadam* and *muckund* restored at Rabindra Sarobar

SREYOSHI DEY



The restoration team gets ready to replant an uprooted tree at Rabindra Sarobar on Sunday. Picture by Anindya Shankar Roy

A team of 20 Calcuttans played doctor on Sunday to rescue two injured souls in the Rabindra Sarobar area — a box nut or *bakshobadam* and a *bayur*, commonly called *muckund*, which got uprooted in a freak thunderstorm 40 days ago.

At 15, these two trees are among the oldest at the city's green heart.

Seeds of the revival mission were sown during the Rabindra Sarobar leg of the **The Telegraph** Explore Calcutta Walks on May 4 and 5 that environmental activist Mudar Patherya had led. "You guys are to blame for this initiative," laughed Mudar as he told **Metro** about how the restoration plan germinated.

"When the walkers, especially B.L. Chandak (the executive director of RP Sanjiv Goenka Group), came across the fallen trees, they said we should do something. We wanted to turn the academic walk into an active one. Not just one where Calcutta walks but also where Calcutta works," Mudar said.

First came the logistics. Bijoygarh-based Nature Mates club pitched in with their know-how on plants and medicines. The joint secretary of the Agri-Horticultural Society of India in Alipore, S.L. Rahman, analysed the chances of survival of the two trees.

Harjit Singh of Chetan Logistics Private Limited gave a crane to lift the trees. All these came free of cost.

"We had sent our cranes for social purposes such as rescue operations at accident sites. *Achcha lagta hai help karna*. Mudar informed me about this initiative and we jumped on to it. We are always ready to help," Singh said, happy with the effort.

One of the trees fell on its side near a children's play area while the other was standing inclined on the side of a concrete house after the storm uprooted it more than a month ago. The branches and leaves were sheared but the trunks were still alive.

"We have trimmed the roots and sprayed anti-fungal medicines and oil-based hormone powder to regenerate them. The next step was to lift the trees with a crane, put it in the pits where they stood and cover the roots with soil. Bamboo supports have to be erected around the trees because the roots will take some time to be able to hold the weight of a grown-up tree," said Arjan Basu Roy, the secretary of Nature Mates.

The team said monsoon would help the trees survive and sprout new leaves in two-three months.

"Restoring trees is not an expensive process at all if contributions such as the one from Harjit come by. Several clubs in the field of tree restoration gave us estimates of around Rs 1 lakh or more for the two trees. When we calculated our effort, it came to around Rs 8,000 for both trees," Mudar said.

The eco-conscious team included young faces — an encouraging sign for the future. "I have a soft corner for wildlife and flora. I remember bringing home an injured snake when I was 10, without caring to know if it was venomous," said 25-year-old Deepak Agarwal, a student of environment and sustainable development at IGNOU.

Sarika Baidya, a young lepidopterist by hobby, said trees were intrinsic to butterfly survival. "I am studying food and nutrition but want to specialise in butterfly nutrition. I actively participate in butterfly gardening at places like Banabitan, Salt Lake," the Shyambazar girl said.

Mudar was happy with the uptake. "We now have the confidence to take this forward. There is no point saying we will plant new saplings for every tree that falls. It would take 15 to 20 years to become mature trees. We should put our resources in restoring the old

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trees.”

He said anyone could report a fallen or uprooted tree in the city at *naturemates@gmail.com* or call Arjan Basu Roy at 9874357414.

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