

FRI Experts to Save Old and Rare Trees in Rashtrapati Bhawan

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A team of the Dehradun-based Forest Research Institute (FRI) has been invited to Rashtrapati Bhawan to help save several old and rare trees which are there in the Presidential Mughal gardens. The team, which reached Delhi on Friday morning, will also determine the exact age of the trees - many of which are believed to be almost 100 years old -- and devise ways to save those among them which are withering or diseased.

Providing details of the project, FRI director, Savita (who uses just her first name), told TOI, "Our institute has been involved in projects to save old trees and heritage plants at places like Kurukshetra, Bodhgaya, Shirdi, Kolkata and Haridwar in the past. Considering our expertise in the area, Rashtrapati Bhawan officials sought technical help from us to find out about the afflicted trees in the Mughal gardens and initiate their treatment. Our team comprising of a forest pathologist and entomologist visited the site on Friday and conducted a survey in this regard."

The Rashtrapati Bhawan has several tree species like khirni, karanj and shisham. According to the FRI team, an estimated 500 trees in the estate's gardens are believed to require intervention since they have either started withering or developed diseases. Forest pathologist NSK Harsh who is part of the four-member team told *TOI* that of the 500 trees that had been identified, some were over 100 years old and were showing signs of aging in which the tree top had begun drying. "Some trees have fallen prey to fungus and other infections. Many are not getting proper nutrition. Some are under stress due to weather onslaughts. Our objective would be to give the trees proper support in terms of giving nutrients, fertilizers as well as insecticides after thorough assessment of their condition. Those trees which are beyond treatment will be removed."

He added that samples of the affected trees had been collected and they will be sent to the FRI lab in Dehradun, after which the treatment of the trees will start from next month. "Considering that a large number of trees will require to be treated, we anticipate that the entire project will take almost one year to complete," he said.

The Times of India (New Delhi), 06 August 2016