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Goa singing 'Maad Maad', pests making coconut 'Ibaad'

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While the rest of Goa appears to be in a mood to sing out its love for coconut or calling it grass, the real coconut-growing farmer is worried about the survival of coconut plantation even if it is not cut for a factory or a housing colony.

In fact the farmer is relieved with Goa government passing the Goa Preservation of Trees Amendment bill and deleting coconut from all other sections, except section 12A, which deals with cutting the coconut trees that are in ruinous condition.

Deletion of coconut tree from the Act, which deals with forest trees, would probably help them in saving several coconut trees, which were not allowed to be cut in spite of deadly Bud Rot disease hitting the coconut plantation.

Uday Mhambro, a small coconut grower and primarily a coconut trader, gathered these photographs of coconut trees from different parts of Goa, from Netravali to Sacorda to Ponda and Pedne.

"I see nowadays more and more coconut trees with its central shoot collapsed wherever I go", he says.

According to Satish Tendulkar, the retired agriculture director, the Bud Rot disease is a normal phenomenon and it is controlled by *immediately* cutting the coconut tree.

However, the number of such trees started increasing in last five years since the Preservation of Trees Act brought restrictions on cutting such coconut trees, he says.

Though there is a provision in the act to cut such trees, the lengthy procedures result into the disease spreading to other coconut trees, says Tendulkar, who now looks after his 2000-tree coconut plantation at Behtoda.

The Bud Rot disease actually hits the roots of the coconut during monsoon, thus weakening the central shoot on top which is neither visible nor treatable due to difficulty in climbing the slippery tree.

While the central shoot suddenly collapses within three months of the disease, the Rhinoceros beetle and Red Palm weevils – both deadly coconut pests - lay eggs on top of the tree. Both these pests multiply and infect all the neighbouring trees, informs Tendulkar.

Both Tendulkar and Mhambro however are equally concerned about coconut trees having no protection after the Preservation of Trees Act is amended.

They thus strongly propose a comprehensive Coconut Protection Act, which would take care of not only coconut trees getting cut for non-farming commercial activity but also the diseases and other nuisances affecting the coconut plantation.

"Coconut is not a forest crop to include it in the Preservation of Trees Act. It's a plantation crop, which needs special protection to plant, preserve, grow and boost its plantation", says Tendulkar.

