

Dying young: no effort to save shisham

By Nadeem Saeed

DERA GHAZI KHAN, Oct 11: Shisham trees along either banks of the gigantic DG Khan Canal are going dry on a rather alarming speed.

The so-far unknown disease affecting shisham has already been spotted in Sargodha and Faisalabad. However, the provincial forest department is least bothered as nothing significant has so far been observed on its part to control the menace of what is being termed here by nature-lovers "death of trees".

Some four kilometres in the west of the city, the canal has always been a picnic resort for the people of this area. During summer, revellers through the canal on holidays to beat heat or celebrate festivities of 'sawan'.

Besides other joyous activities, they cook and eat under the shady shisham trees on the canal banks. Morning-walkers are also used to visit the area where long queues of Shisham trees are a major source of attraction.

Besides the scenic beauty and providing healthy environment, trees along canals strengthen their embankments.

For the last quite some time, the frequent visitors noticed that the trees have started becoming dry. First leaves start shedding from the shoots at the top of an affected tree. Later, in a matter of few weeks, the whole tree becomes leaveless. In the next stage, bark starts detaching from the stem and, consequently, the ailing tree succumbs to the still unknown disease.

Usually, trees ranging from five



DERA GHAZI KHAN: A clump of dry shisham trees on the right bank of the DG Khan Canal — Dawn photo

to 10 in numbers become dry in a row in intervals between normal green trees.

This scribe recently travelled a few kilometres upstream along the canal from the Quetta Road and counted more than 200 complete and semi-dry trees on both sides of the waterway.

Earlier, it was the responsibility of the Irrigation department to take care of the trees. As this department had an army of baildars, it was looking after the trees

conveniently though there were also complaints of illegal cutting off woods.

Trimming and weeding were done annually besides maintaining a specific distance between two trees so each could take its due share of light and air.

However, since the Forest department has taken over the charge of these trees in 1992, nothing has been done to take care of the precious treasure, in terms of both environment and natural

beauty. Weeds are allowed to grow up while necessary distance between two trees is not being maintained.

Consequently, in the struggle for survival, trees which cannot get the necessary food — minerals, air, water and light — expose to the attack of diseases after becoming weak.

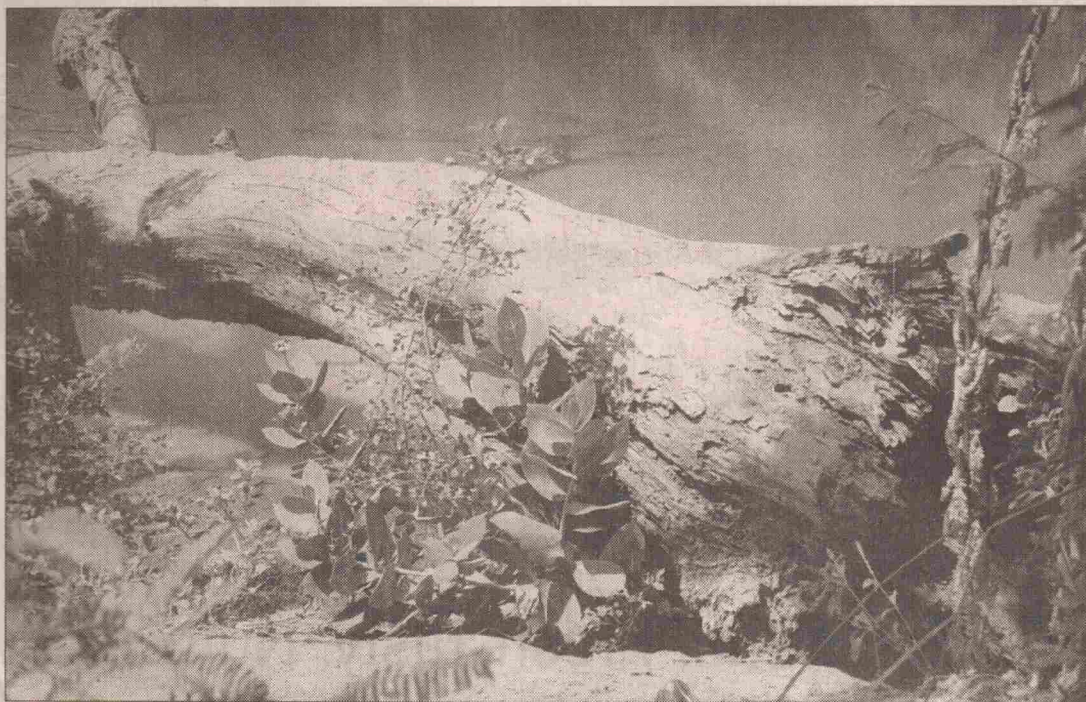
When contacted, divisional forest officer (DFO) Shahid Pervaiz Khan admitted that the trees were becoming dry on an alarming rate. He said he had not reached any conclusion after examining the damaged trees that what was the real cause of their dryness. However, apparently it seemed an insect (termite) attack, he thought.

"We have written a letter to our research institute in Gadwal, Faisalabad, to send a team of experts to diagnose the problem", he informed.

He said that Shisham trees of nearby fields were also being affected by the menace.

When asked about the lack of care, he said the department had only forest guards who, unlike baildars of the Irrigation department, were supposed only to check wood theft. Moreover, he said, for the last few years, the department had no enough funds in hand to spend on the looking-after of trees.

It is suggested that the departments of forest and irrigation should launch a joint effort to save the trees from destruction as the former's technical expertise and latter's manpower can help the trees from 'dying young'.



A DRY tree finally succumbs to the negligence of the Forest Department — Dawn photo