

Year in and year out, the government exhorts us to grow more trees. Every year with the advent of monsoon, there is a 'tree-planting day'; the government and civic authorities buy billions of saplings and plant them (or say they are doing so!). And yet, 50 years later there is not a tree to be seen. In fact if anything the country is an arid desert. The so-called tree-planting week is a means to an end. The end being to sequester the money entailed in buying the billions of saplings.

Not only do the ghost trees not grow but our people are great at cutting down trees, from which they seem to derive an insane pleasure. The Capital Development Authority Islamabad is a great expert at this. In fact it is an expert at arboriculture. Without knowing the name or tree species, it digs out the existing ones and replaces them dead trees imported at enormous cost. When the dead trees do not grow, they are uprooted — again at great cost. Lately they have cut down swathes of trees in Islamabad — trees that took 30 and 40 years to grow to this size. Islamabad, the so-called beautiful city, now has little to recommend itself in the way of any architectural pretensions or town planning savvy.

The only reason the appellation "beautiful" came to be applied to the city was due to its verdure, particularly in a country that is bereft of tree cover. The plea is taken that the mulberry tree that grows with ease in Islamabad causes asthmatic allergy. To accept this and propagate this lie is to be a super ignoramus. The paper mulberry alone does not produce pollen. All plants — whether trees, shrubs, flowers, grasses — produce pollen. The worst offenders are grasses. To accept this plea means to uproot and terminate grasses too — and that includes wheat, rice and other crops. So we should grow no food crops and reduce the whole landscape to a glazed sphere. That would exterminate us

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A suicidal trend

Cutting trees and demolishing buildings to create acres of freeways for lawless drivers to practice their craft of impatience is not progress

and perhaps that would be a good thing for man himself is the worst pollutant and polluter of all.

In the matter of cutting down of trees lately a craze has started — of building underpasses on major roads in the Punjab. The present chief minister seems to have a single-track mind. Build underpasses. In his zeal to do so, most magnificent trees in Lahore that took nearly 100 years to grow to their great beauty have been cut down. In Rawalpindi in order to widen an already dual-carriage road, the Mall, which has six lanes with a median in between, beautiful little gar-



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should in fact not be necessary. What needs to be done is to identify the problem, which is that the traffic on our roads is totally lawless and chaotic. The remedy therefore is not to go on widening the roads and cutting down trees but to ensure that the

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dens and parks have been cut down and are in the process of being cut down. The triangular garden in front of the entrance to the women's university, formerly the president's residence, has disappeared and now they are cutting down all the trees along the Mall.

The Mall is already wide enough. It is not possible to widen every road. It

people drive in accordance with the Highway Code, and that the police enforces correct driving. The first step is to teach the traffic police the Highway Code. Since they are as ignorant and indolent as one can conceivably make them, there is absolute chaos on the roads with the blind leading the blind.

Once this remedy is applied, the same road will become more than ad-

equate. After all London has 13 million vehicles on the roads and yet traffic moves effortlessly, quietly and smoothly. The reason is that the drivers are law-abiding and considerate of other road users. With streets in London being as narrow as they are, there is no question of demolishing all the buildings on either side. Take the example of King's Road in South West London. It has two-way traffic, single lane without a median. It is a major road linking motorways in the South West and has very heavy traffic with double-decker buses tail to nose. And yet traffic moves on, without a horn blown. Our remedy thus does not lie in cutting down trees and demolishing buildings in order to create acres of freeways for lawless drivers to practice their craft of impatience.

People who chop down trees appear to have no knowledge or consideration of the fact that a tree takes years to grow and if allowed to remain, can stand there for hundreds of years cleaning the air we breathe of carbon dioxide and replenishing it with oxygen which is our lifeline. Cutting trees down is suicidal. Trees and plants in addition to being crucial for our well being and culture, soften the environment, making it green and pleasant.

The other day, my neighbour who had grown five beautiful poplar trees, now 30 feet tall, had them chopped down, without any logic. These chopped trees were cast on the rubbish dump, forlorn and not even being used as firewood. If we cannot grow any more trees, can we at least spare the few that we have? Please don't cut any trees!