

Health

Green thumb spruces up Bangladesh

JESSORE: Ohid Sarder prides a rusted nail from a tree and drops it into his bucket, another eyesore scrubbed from the countryside as he embarks on a one-man mission to clean up Bangladesh. The 53-year-old self-professed tree hugger has been riding his bicycle across the country, in a grassroots effort to free trees of the billboards and clutter nailed to their trunks. Trees in Bangladesh are often used as free advertising space, with every available inch of wood plastered with placards until the trunk is barely visible.

The billboards might disintegrate over time but the nails remain embedded deep in the wood-agitating tree-lover Sarder, who has devoted his life to healing these wounds. "Trees have life. They feel pain just as we do," the self-styled conservationist told AFP in Jessore district in the country's southwest. "I have seen how these nails have killed trees, and how they are causing them pain." Sarder grew up idolizing Jagdish Chandra Bose, a prominent Bengali botanist who wrote about the emotions of

plants in the early decades of the 20th century.

Inspired, Sarder began planting trees in Jhenaidah, his home district, and neighboring Jessore, a passion he kept up for decades. But this year it occurred to him that planting trees was not enough—he needed to protect those already under threat. Traversing battered roads with a bicycle, bucket and a metal rod welded with prongs, Sarder began prying thick nails and spikes from abused trees across the country. Since he began his beautification drive in July he has collected more than 80 kilograms (176 pounds) of them. "It looks easy, but it isn't. It takes a lot of effort to pull out a rusted nail that has been there for years," he said.

Seeking to inspire

It is arduous and thankless work. His wife complains that Sarder, a mason by trade, spends more time with his trees doing unpaid volunteer work than earning a wage. Often, he doubles back on a section of road to discover fresh billboards hammered into his beloved trees.—AFP



JESSORE: Bangladeshi tree environmentalist Ohid Sarder, 53, removes nails from a tree trunk near a road in Jessore, a western district of Bangladesh. — AFP

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