

## **Hundreds of trees cut down for PM Modi's rally in Bihar**

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**Patna:** Hundreds of trees have been cut down, chopped off and uprooted to make space for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally to campaign for the BJP-led NDA candidates in the ongoing state assembly polls in Madhepura district here on November 1, officials said on Saturday.

"In a bid to arrange space for holding Modi's election rally, hundreds of trees including fruit-bearing ones, were cut down, chopped off and uprooted in the new campus of the B P Mandal University," a district official, who did not wish to be named, said.

This cutting of trees was first reported by Madhepura-based news portal Madhepuratimes. Its editor Rudra Narain Yadav said that nearly 400 to 500 trees were cut down and over 1,000 two year old plants of several species, including fruit-bearing ones, were uprooted and chopped off for the rally.

Madhepura District Magistrate Mohd. Sohail has refused to say anything on this issue despite repeated attempts by IANS.

A green activist Ranjeev, who is working in the flood-prone Kosi region that comprises the Madhepura and Saharsa districts, said that it was sad and unfortunate that hundreds of trees were cut down for the sake of an election rally.

"This message is clear, green trees were sacrificed for holding a rally of Modi, who has little concern for environmental issues in the country," Ranjeev told IANS over telephone from Saharsa, about 250 km from here.

Local residents say they are helpless. "We can only protest and express our anger," Sanjeev Kumar, a youth said.

An official of the university, B N Viveka, said the university gave permission to hold the rally, not to cut trees.

BJP district president Anil Kumar Yadav in his written submission to the district administration has assured that any damage incurred before and after the rally would be paid for by the party.

Yadav also said that new saplings would be planted after the rally.

Bihar is trying to increase its green cover. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has time and again said that the green cover in Bihar has increased from 9.79 percent in 2011 to 12.86 percent in 2015, thanks to measures taken by the state government.

Nitish Kumar said the aim was to increase it to 15 percent by 2017.

Forest officials admit that Bihar lost most of its green cover when the state of Jharkhand was carved out of it in 2000.

Undivided Bihar had a forest cover of 17 percent.

Polling for the 243-member Bihar assembly is taking place in five phases between October 12 and November 5. The counting of votes is slated for November 8.

- IANS