

## BENGALURU

# Builders welcome NGT order

**STAFF REPORTER**

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In May 2016, when the NGT had reassigned the buffer zone for lakes to 75 metres from the previous 30 metres, a large number of houses suddenly became illegal. The expansion of the buffer zone saw these properties lose the right to develop. The Supreme Court overruling this order on Tuesday has come as a relief to thousands of households and the real estate sector.

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) and Bangalore Development Authority (BD) had stopped issuing plan sanction for any development of these plots. Civic officials estimated that nearly 35,000 families were impacted, while the Draft Revised Master Plan–2031 by the BDA earmarks 88.489 sq.km., or 10.01% of the conurbation area, for buffer zones.

“About 5% of land earmarked for residential use in the city will be undevelop-able as a result of the NGT buffer,” the draft RMP-2031 said.

V. Ravichandar, former member of BBMP Restructuring Committee that used GIS studies to tally the impact, said that over 1.25 lakh residential and commercial units – or, around 5% of the total number of properties in the city – had been impacted by the NGT order. “This was a humanitarian problem of historically legal properties turning illegal overnight and losing property development rights,” he said.

BBMP Commissioner N. Manjunath Prasad said the civic body would implement the Supreme Court order once they get it. He expected a rush of developers, held up earlier, seeking plan sanction.

R. Prasad, additional director, Town Planning, BBMP said all high-rises that were stuck due to the NGT order would now be reviewed and cleared case by case. “Zonal offices will be instructed to follow suit,” he said.

S. Suresh Hari, Vice President, Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI), Bengaluru, welcomed the Supreme Court verdict saying that the NGT order was ‘unsustainable’. “The State government should have challenged it long back. But we did it. We are happy it’s been reversed. Nearly 80 of our projects were stuck causing immense loss to the industry. Now, they will restart,” he said.

“The reduction of the buffer zone may end up killing larger lakes,” says T.V. Ramachandra, a researcher at the Indian Institute of Science. “It is tragic, and not based on scientific principles. Buffer zones are essentially flood plains that are capable of retaining water. We have shown that for lakes over 100 acres, we need a buffer zone of 75m. Else, the lake will die gradually,” he said.

Buffer zones should be linked to the size of the lakes, he said while dismissing arguments that the NGT order was unsustainable. “Even in the 30m zone, there are violations. The State government’s role should be to clear the violation and not to justify it,” said Prof. Ramachandra.

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