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# Slapped with Rs 500 crore fine, Karnataka blacklists ex-counsel

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BBMP, BDA and BWSSB were slapped with the fine over Bellandur Lake fire | Express

**By Manoj Sharma**

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BENGALURU: After the state government and local civic bodies faced a major embarrassment over the National Green Tribunal pulling them up for lack of an action plan on Bellandur, Agara and Varthur lakes, the state government held its former counsel responsible for NGT levying a Rs 500 crore fine on the government. BBMP, BDA and BWSSB, which were slapped with a fine of Rs 500 crore in the case of the Bellandur Lake fire, had filed a review petition with the NGT, that was recently quashed.

Karnataka Chief Secretary T M Vijay Bhaskar told TNIE, “NGT set up a commission which filed the report, on which Additional Chief Secretary of the Urban Development Department Mahendra Jain prepared an ‘action taken’ report on city lakes, and sent it to our counsel Ashok Devraj in Delhi. Devraj kept it with him without filing our objection.

When it was not submitted, the NGT said that it is in the nature of acceptance of the report submitted by the commission, and slapped a Rs 500 crore fine. It was because of the counsel that the fine was slapped. He will not be assigned any of our cases.”

An advocate for BBMP said, “Despite having the report in his hand, he (Devraj) did not submit it, which caused us major embarrassment. Also, we can’t deny that somewhere, local agencies could not maintain the lakes to a perfect level, but the condition of the lakes was not as poor as was showed. The fine amount has to be transferred to an escrow account for the execution of an action plan to clean Bellandur Lake. This is taxpayers’ money that is going to be sent.”

On May 11, 2018, NGT ordered an independent commission consisting of advocates, an Indian Institute of Science professor, State Pollution Control Board and Lake Development Authority to inspect the condition of Bellandur, Agara and Varthur lakes, and submit a report on the extent of damage in Bellandur Lake.