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# Despite abundant rainfall, Bengaluru will go dry, warn experts | Bengaluru News - Times of India

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The showers over the last couple of weeks have surely been refreshing for Bengalureans. But the rainfall we have had so far is not enough to save the impending water crisis in our city, say experts. Thanks to the rapid encroachment of all available land in the name of progress and building infrastructure, we have left barely any space for ground water retention of rain water.

What has caused the depletion

Professor TV Ramachandra, from the Indian Institute of Science, has been researching on this for years. According to him, the problem is growing at an alarming rate, and the improper planning in the city has led to these problems. "It's all got to do with the landscape and water mismanagement of the city. Back in 1973, 59% of Bengaluru was green, while only 7% was covered with concrete structures. Today, unfortunately, 81% of the land is covered with concrete structures, which leaves very little scope for water percolation after a good rain. The underlying layer of the ground will not have water. This is alarming, especially when you consider the fact that nearly 40% of Bengaluru depends on ground

water for sustenance,” he explains.

While the effects of growing real estate have had a direct impact on the consumption of available ground water, Prof. Ramachandra tells us that there have been no attempts made or measures taken to ensure that the water is refilled. “Add the effects of BBMP to this, which has been covering the city’s drains with concrete. This is narrowing down the flow of water from one part of the city to the other,” he adds.

Saving over 30 TMC of rainwater is possible, but it is not happening Prof. Ramachandra says that, on an average, Bengaluru receives around 750 mm of rainfall, annually. “Bengaluru requires about 18 TMC (thousand million cubic feet) of water annually. The average amount of water we can save and get from rain is about 15 TMC. This means that a good 70% of the water requirement of this city can be met just by conserving rain water. Add to this the fact that every 18 TMC of water generates another 18 TMC of waste water. If this waste water is treated, we can have a total of 30 TMC water available for our consumption. And the only way to do this is to ensure the processes for ground water to be recharged and refilled during the rains are set in place,” he explains.

Catchment area... What’s that?

Environmentalist Akshay Heblikar believes that Bengaluru does need to do more in terms of water conservation. “Bengaluru does not have a perennial source of water, given that most of our rivers and lakes have either dried up or have been encroached. We need to be extremely cautious as far as water use is concerned. Most Bengalureans live in the peripheral areas of the city, most of which were classified ‘grey’ — with no groundwater, several years ago. The Cauvery continues to be the primary source of water for Bengaluru, followed by borewells. But with the city’s catchment

areas shrinking by as much as 35% over the past decades, the city will, in all probability, not have any water in the next three-five years,” he says.

Activist Srinivas Alavilli, of Citizens for Bengaluru, says that the city was built in such a way that the lakes were interconnected with the storm water drainage system, ensuring that the abundant rainfall was not wasted. “Institutionally, they have failed, as the concretisation has led to these catchment areas shrinking and the city having very little space to make sure that the rainfall converts into water. Now, every street has construction debris and sand that are blocking the drains. Even well-planned areas like Jayanagar are facing this problem,” he points out.

[Water scarcity](#) is a reality, and it is time for people to do something about it

Srinivas says that people need to be a lot more conscientious when it comes to water consumption. “It is summer, we are already reading reports of water scarcity situations, but we see people in apartment complexes wasting water by washing cars daily and using it unwisely in many other ways. One of the first questions that one needs to address is to understand where the water is coming from. People need to realise that the impending scarcity is real,” he says.

He stresses that people in apartment complexes, in particular, are clueless about the many tankers that are being called in to ensure their taps are flowing. “Awareness of the journey of water from the source to the homes is something that has to be taught to the common public. The media, Ward Committee heads and the BBMP need to work together for this. And the BBMP, BWSSB and Ward Committees need to ensure that the water is charged at the street level. I stress on the word street level as that is where the water

harvesting can be managed in the right way,” adds Srinivas.

This can be done with both political and citizen participation. Simple measures like clearing drains and ensuring that the water reaches the lakes will help ensure groundwater is replenished sooner, states Srinivas. Communities can manage the water this way. “The [rainwater harvesting](#) law was made nearly a decade ago, it just needs better implementation,” says Srinivas, adding that water is a crisis similar to air pollution.

Need someone like M Visvesvaraya

Prof Ramachandra says that M Visvesvaraya remains the role model for urban planning. One should look at how he managed to plan an ideal locality like Jayanagar. The area, which was then Asia’s biggest residential locality, was a model for urban planners. “Unfortunately, where are the [engineers](#) in the state who have the vision? We lack visionary leaders like M Visvesvaraya,” laments Prof. Ramachandra.

Lake rejuvenation needed

While Bengaluru was once proudly the city of lakes, the same lakes have brought in shame to the city with incidents like frothing. While the authorities are rejuvenating local lakes like the one in Jakkur, which has become a model to emulate, and the ones drying up, like Sarakki, Prof. Ramachandra says lakes need to be rejuvenated fast. The need of the hour, he states, is ensuring these lakes are maintained well, with periodic de-weeding and also connecting the drains to bring the rainwater to them properly.

Why are the reservoirs running dry?

A report on May 13 (above) suggested that 13 of the state’s dams are running dry and the state is looking at the water crisis eventually. Prof Ramachandra says, “This has to do with the mismanagement of the catchment area around the rivers. This

reduces the water holding capacity of the river, which could have otherwise ensured better flow to the dams. Instead, the bad management of water has ensured that the water often ends up flowing over the land and, therefore gets wasted as the [reservoir](#) is not being able to retain the water.”

What needs to be done at the citizen level

- Ensure water consumption is monitored, especially in apartment complexes.
- Use minimal water for washing cars.
- Stop using showers often while bathing
- Work with Ward Committees to ensure streets have proper drainage system
- Ensure the implementation of more rainwater harvesting programmes.

Ways to conserve rainwater

- While most apartment complexes say they have rainwater harvesting programmes, the water crisis needs to be addressed by better implementation of the same.
- Rainwater can be used for gardening and washing cars, if used well.

— With inputs from Prathibha Joy

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