

Large B'luru apartments without sewage treatment should face criminal charges: NGT panel

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The National Green Tribunal-appointed committee monitoring the rejuvenation of Bellandur and Varthur lakes has asked for filing of criminal cases against large apartments which do not have sewage treatment plants (STPs) and dump their sewage into the lakes. The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has also been asked to stop the supply of water in these apartments.

As the rejuvenation works for Bellandur-Varthur lakes continue, the state government has finally transferred the Rs 500 crore fine amount to the escrow account as directed by the NGT in its order. These developments came to light as the committee, which is monitoring the lake rejuvenation process, apprised the local residents.

The two lakes, once full of life, were reduced to cesspools of sewage and sludge due to the increased flow of untreated sewage. While not much was done by the authorities despite much noise from civil society, it was the NGT which took suo motu cognisance of the matter in 2016 and indicted the state and local authorities like BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike), BWSSB and the KSPCB (Karnataka State Pollution Control Board).

The committee headed by former Lokayukta and Supreme Court Judge Justice (retired) Santosh Hegde and including veteran scientist and member of the committee TV Ramachandra, is overseeing the process after the green court found the state government was not fulfilling its promises.

The Bellandur lake as planned is currently being de-watered and temporary sewage diversion channels are being created. Desilting process will start once the lake is free of water as directed by the same committee. For the desilting process, the BBMP has also identified quarry and pits for the dumping of silt from the lake.

The NGT has also directed that no concretisation of stormwater drains should take place and has asked for a report on encroachments of stormwater drains from Agara-Bellandur-Varthur.

The committee also observed that BBMP has to take responsibility and do fumigation to control mosquito menace due to the drying of the lake bed.

If all goes well, the committee has promised that the two lakes will be restored in 18-24 months and will be a model of lake restoration for the entire country.