

NGT pulls up State over lake rejuvenation

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The National Green Tribunal (NGT) pointed to ‘patent non-compliance in critical areas’ by the State and its authorities in matters relating to the highly polluted Bellandur, Agara and Varthur lakes in the city.

During a recent hearing, the NGT’s Principal Bench, referring to the report submitted by the NGT-appointed committee to oversee protection and rejuvenation of lakes, said beyond saying that work is in progress, there is no specific information on the status of 14 Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) to be constructed.

“The Committee has noticed from the submissions made by the State PCB (Pollution Control Board) that treated water was being allowed to flow into the (sewage) network to mix with the sewage and then to flow into the STP to get recycled for the second time without any purpose. Fencing of the lake area to prevent encroachments has not been done. The illegal colony in the

lake belt has not been shifted. CCTV cameras and watch towers have not been installed. Marshals and watchmen have not been deployed,” the NGT order observed.

Further, the NGT said there is no information about maintenance of buffer zones at the lakes and rajakaluves, and compensation determined has not been recovered, neither has de-silting and de-weeding been done. Pointing out to other lapses, the tribunal said the illegally constructed road within the lake by dumping C&D (construction and debris) has not been removed, and there has been no information about setting up of Real Time Water Quality Monitoring Systems.

“There is also non-compliance with regard to deposit of 25 crore by the BBMP and furnishing of performance guarantee of the sum of 100 crore by Karnataka for which there is no explanation. The State of Karnataka has shown lack of concern on such a sensitive matter in spite of stringent orders of this tribunal, which is not conducive to the rule of law,” the NGT said in its order, directing the Additional Chief Secretary (Urban Development), Karnataka, and chiefs of the BBMP, BDA, BWSSB and the Member Secretary of the KSPCB to remain present on the next date with the compliance reports.

They have also been asked to come up with explanation why “coercive action including civil imprisonment” should not be ordered for violations of the orders of the tribunal.

U.V. Singh from the committee, headed by N. Santosh Hegde, said their report consists of recommendations which were not part of the earlier orders. “We have recommended measures to make operations, such as de-silting and sewage diversion, better,” he said.

T.V. Ramachandra from the Indian Institute of Science, who was part of the committee, said there has only been “discussions” about rejuvenation and protection. “There is a lack of interest. In any other country, if there is such frothing of a lake and the judiciary intervenes, within two years there would be some improvement. But here, no such thing has happened. The buffer zone has been violated, there are encroachments. The day citizens wake up, the colonial setup will disappear,” he said.