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Varthur lake catches fire, 3rd time in two years



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A massive fire broke out in Varthur lake on Sunday afternoon, with smoke billowing out from the wetland of the lake for more than five hours.

Residents of Varthur said fire could be seen at three places on the lake area. During the two instances of fire in 2017 and one last year, it was found that garbage and dry grass had caught fire. This is the first time the wetland area has caught fire and the magnitude of the blaze is shocking, said officials and residents.

The fire broke out around 1 pm. It turned massive by 3 pm, and the residents and the lake warden sought the help of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel.

The firefighters came immediately, but could not reach the middle of the lake. "The fire broke out exactly 1 km from the lake's inlet. Firefighters could not reach the wetland and the water they sprayed couldn't douse the fire. But it will not spread as the place is surrounded by water," said a BDA official at the spot.

"Only experts can say what caused it. The firemen couldn't do much as they hadn't come prepared. Our request for NDRF assistance was ignored. Almost 20 acres of flora and fauna were charred," said Jagadish Reddy, the lake warden. "The fire was partially doused by evening," he said.

"There were plenty of birds in the lake as it is the breeding season for them. The fire may have killed many of them," Reddy said.

"The BDA commissioner had written to BBMP in October last year on posting marshals there. But the lake is yet to get the marshals," said a resident.

A BDA official said, "The fire may be accidental or intentional. There have been many debates on what causes fire in the wetland area. In this instance, it may be intentional." Reddy said one fire engine has been kept on standby at the lake.

Ramprasad, founder of Friends of Lakes, said, "The fire incidents are common in lakes during January, February and March as they generally turn dry. Leaves of aquatic plants turning dry or the presence of dry grass may have caused the fire. The wetlands have plenty of water vapour that causes thick black smoke."