

IISc scientists disprove minor irrigation department's road claim on Varthur Lake

BENGALURU, DHNS: The construction of a mud road through the Varthur Lake for laying the pipeline of KC valley project had left citizens and activists locking horns with the minor irrigation department and sought the intervention of the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

Determined to get away with its work, the department had claimed that it was only working on an existing road along the lake.

However, the inspection report by the NGT team, assisted by the scientists of Indian Institute of Science (IISc), has not only disproved the department's argument but also proved a possible nexus between land mafia and builders.

The experts have recommended the NGT to order a high-level inquiry to unravel the guilt of the officers involved in the episode.

The NGT-appointed commission, led by senior advocate Raj Punjwani, visited Varthur Lake and listened to the arguments of citizens in April this



A mud road being laid through the Varthur Lake for laying a pipeline. DH FILE PHOTO

year about the department illegally building a road disregarding the rules and laws on lakes.

The department argued that the road has been laid on an already existing road and will dismantle it on completion of the project.

Doubtful of the department's claims, the commission requested the scientists of IISc to verify the facts.

The scientists submitted their report in the first week of May to the commission highlighting that there was no trace

of any road passing through the lake!

"We have been doing research in these localities since 1997 and there was no such huge road till March 2017. But in 2017, a local builder created a mud road by pushing the fence of the lake. In Bengaluru's history, we have not seen the removal of a road after the completion of the intended purpose and none of the para-state agency neither have the authority nor will to ensure the dismantling of the road.

Laying pipes will erode the physical integrity of the lake, apart from triggering flood-like situation in the neighbourhood with these pipes blocking the stormwater drains (SWDs). These works violate NGT's earlier orders on buffer zones of lakes and SWDs," the scientists said in their report to the NGT commission.

Based on this, the commission opined: "Neither there was a DPR to execute a project worth Rs 13.50 crore nor was there any environmental

study undertaken to assess the ecological consequences due to the building of the road. The department has also not considered alternative scientific methods to lay the pipes. Having dumped only building debris, the chief engineer of the minor irrigation department, deliberately avoided giving complete and correct information on the extent of the road.

"Satellite pictures do not show any existing road in the lakebed earlier to the award of the project in 2016."

Summing up observations, the panel noted: "The commission has not even an iota of doubt in holding with regard to the construction of the said road that the integrity and ecology of the Varthur Lake have been seriously compromised. The allegation of scientists about the nexus with land mafia and builders is prima facie justified and an appropriate independent enquiry needs to be instituted to unravel the guilt of the officers involved in the catastrophe."