

# Water mismanagement leaves India's Silicon Valley parched

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## Bracing for another thirsty summer

India's Silicon Valley is bracing for yet another thirsty summer.

Faucets are running dry and the lakes that once nurtured the southern city of Bangalore and its nearly 10 million residents are either parched or fetid with industrial waste and toxic effluents.

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## Bangalore's water woes

Much like Cape Town in South Africa, Bangalore's water woes have been in the making for some time. Years of unplanned urbanisation, rapid population growth and poor management of water resources have now reached a critical point in the southern Indian metropolis.

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## Declining water bodies

A 2016 study by the Energy and Wetlands Research Group at the Indian Institute of

Science in Bangalore showed that the city's water bodies declined by as much as 80 percent between 1973 and 2016.

Over that same period, the concrete area in the city, once known for its gardens and lakes, went up by more than 1,000 percent.

T.V. Ramachandra, the scientist who led the study, said mismanagement of both land and water resources has led to the current crisis, in which the city is now critically dependent on the Cauvery river and the annual monsoon rains as its principal sources of drinking water.

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## Dying lakes

The lakes that once provided natural rainwater reservoirs and helped recharge groundwater have largely given up the fight against rampant encroachment. The few that have survived the onslaught are struggling.

Images of Bellandur Lake (in pic), the city's largest water body, covered with a foamy mix of filth, routinely make the headlines.

Another major lake, Ulsoor, is choked with garbage and construction waste and is gasping under a blanket of thick waterweeds.

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### A thirsty city

And as the thirsty city looks desperately for water, borewells are digging deeper and deeper, each year depleting what remains of the city's groundwater.

Large water storage tanks line the rooftops of Bangalore's new commercial and residential buildings, which are almost entirely dependent on private water suppliers.

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### Going Cape Town way

A study recently published in a leading environmental magazine, 'Down to Earth', said Bangalore could go the Cape Town way - and face acute water scarcity in the not-too-distant future.

The study said the water table in Bangalore has fallen from 10-12 meters to 76-91 meters below the surface in the last two decades as the number of extraction wells soared.



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## Water lifeline

Mobile tankers have become the water lifeline for the city's poorer residents, who line up every day to fill buckets and pots.

"There is severe crisis. The actual sufferers are the poor people living in the slums," said rainwater harvesting expert Ayyappa Masagi.

"Rich people can afford to buy water. Poor people are spending like 2 to 5 rupees (5-10 cents) per pot of water," he said. That's a significant cost for people who sometimes make less than 200 rupees a day.

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## To get worse

With Bangalore's population likely to reach 20 million by 2031, the city's water troubles are likely to get worse.

Water stations have already popped up across the city for people to buy drinking water.

One resident, S.R. Reddy, said he was spending over \$20 a month to buy water for his family.

"We spend one fourth of our earnings for water," he said.

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## Poor management

Experts in Bangalore say the problem is not the availability of water but its management.

Ramachandra, of the Indian Institute of Science, said his study showed that almost 70 percent of the city's water requirement could be effectively harvested from its annual rainfall.

The study also recommended working with local communities and ensuring their participation in lake rejuvenation and waste management plans.



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## Reviving lakes

Some citizens' groups in Bangalore have begun to collaborate with the city administration to help restore the fresh water lakes.

Not too long ago one of the city's oldest lakes, Agara Lake, was heavily polluted.

With funding from the state government, a project to manage the sewage inflow, removal of the weeds and de-silting of the lake was started in 2016.

The lake is now showing signs of revival.