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Small Town Endeavour On Lake Regeneration In Karnataka Results In Big Time Success

M Raghuram | Updated: September 08, 2018

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Tucked between the evergreen foothills of the Western Ghats and Arabian Sea, the quaint Moodbidri town has embarked upon a fruitful journey of reviving its water bodies - without any help from the government.

Alarmed by the rapidly-decreasing water levels, the town was faced with inevitable water shortage. The way out? Revival of water bodies, which were earlier perennial.

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Moodbidri - also known as Jain Kashi for its famous Basadis, which are ancient Jain heritage structures, and religious tourism - draws its domestic water from the Puchchemogaru dam built across the Phalguni river.





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“We realised that we could not depend on the river forever. So, we started looking inwards and found out that the 18 water bodies that were feeding our town for centuries could be our hope”, says Dr. Muralikrishna, the motivating force behind this social movement.

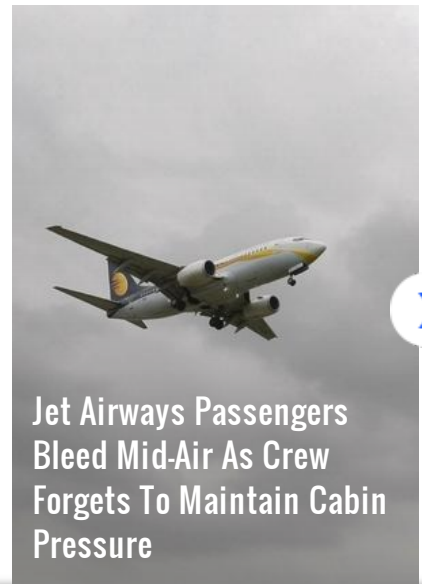
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“With the help of a few social service clubs, we found out that these 18 water bodies were located in the right places to hold rainwater. The excess water would flow into the other tanks using conduits, channels, and abutments and revetments (structures that can hold water by the side of another water body) that have been built in the past. Our only job was to desilt the tanks, clean them up, and help the rainwater get stored,” he added.

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This initiative is one of the biggest lake revival and rejuvenation programmes in this part of the country.

Minor water bodies coming back to life



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According to historian professor Pundikai Ganapayya Bhat, the tank has been dry for over two centuries now.

The Mohalla ward is particularly significant, since it has a total of three water bodies - Basadi Kere, Ankasaley Kere and Mohalla Kere. "These three water bodies in one ward can provide water to the entire ward for over 45 days, and also provide for open and dug wells in the vicinity as well.

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The Ankasaley Kere has enough water veins and can be a perennial water source if deepened and widened," says Dr Livingston C Soans, also known fondly as the Waterman, for his use of pineapple cultivation through drip irrigation and his efforts to save the Kadalakere tank from extinction.



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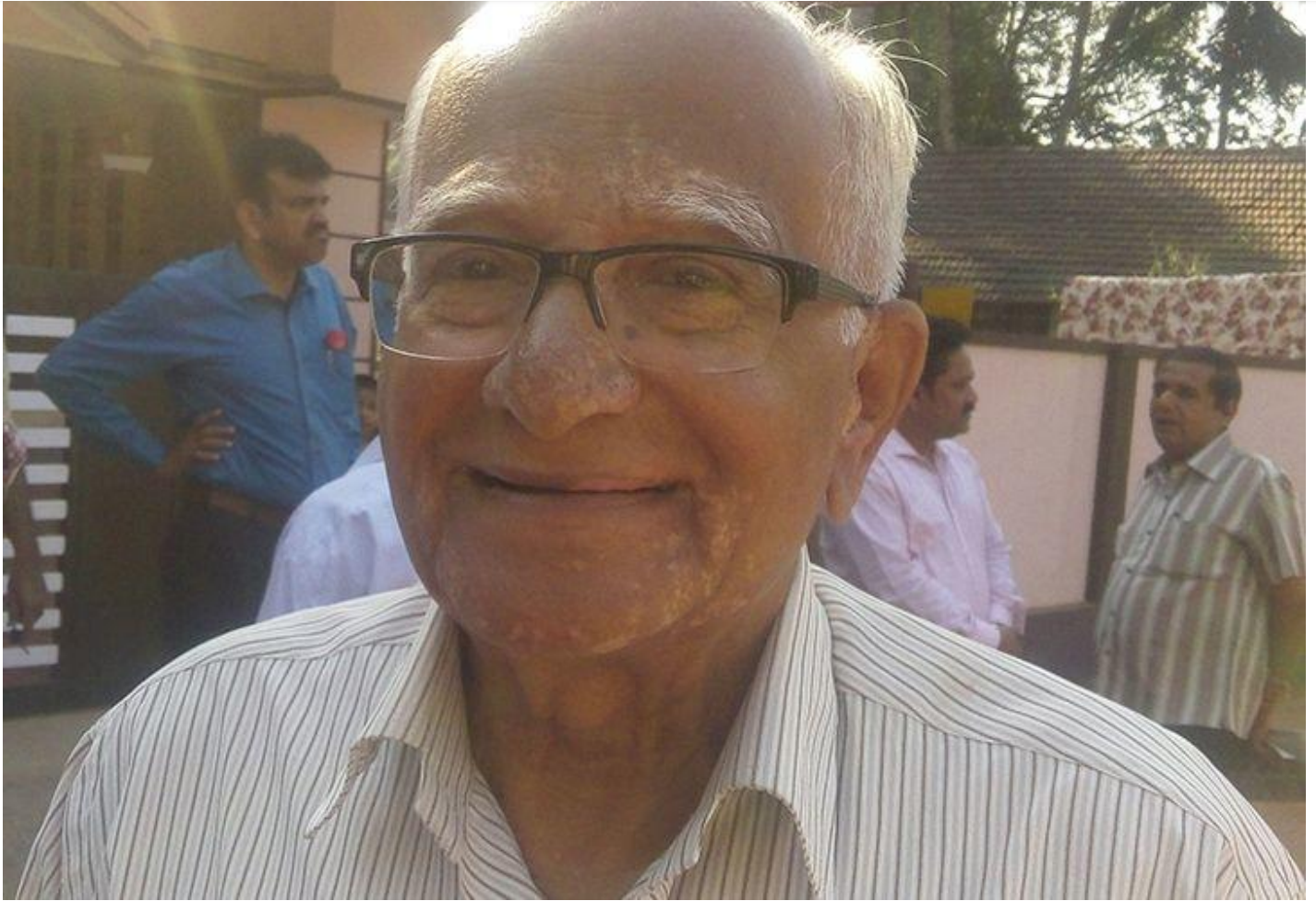
daily water supply to the 100 households they initially supported, claims Dhananjay, a local think tank.

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“Dug wells, bogs, and other minor water bodies are also coming back to life. The revival of all 18 tanks will cut our dependency on the Puchchemogaru dam for domestic use by at least 50 per cent. It will also take care of at least 35 per cent of Moodbidri’s drinking water needs”, claims Dr. L. C. Soans.

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Encouraged by the runaway success of Mohalla Kere, the group headed by Dr. Muralikrishna took up renovation of the multi-level water body, Uliya Kere, in December, 2017.

"The system of holding the water in different tanks nearby was already in place. All we had to do was to open up the channels and desilt the tanks. Now, we have not one but three tanks full of fresh water," says Dr. Muralikrishna.



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The successful implementation and execution of the plan was made possible through collective effort and participation, along with the help of large organisations like Rotary and Dharmasthala temples.

The future for such plans is bright, yet challenging. They have identified Subhashnagar Kere for the next summer, according to Dr. Muralikrishna.

“Reviving and maintaining these water bodies with people’s participation has been a herculean task. In some places like Ankasalay, there were no traces of a tank. Large portions did not show the legal boundaries, but we had to dig and expose the boundaries to establish the legality.



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We had to convince the people living around the place of the importance of revival of the tanks. Today, we have the full support of the people living around all 18 water bodies in Moodbidri," he explains.

Students of the Jain Junior College, Dhavala College, and the Mahaveera College of Moodbidri have helped in creating awareness about the importance of reviving tanks and keeping them free of debris and pollution.

Demands for replicating the project statewide



overgrown beyond recognition, the fully-revived Mohalla Kere is a testimony to what combined efforts can achieve”, he says.

“Gowri Kere, which is on the higher level of the town, has water till the end of March and if revived, can hold water for a longer period. The tank should be the next candidate for revival,” adds Professor Bhat.

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Currently, Moodbidri is drawing four million litres of water from the Puchchemogaru dam. During summer and tourist season, the water consumption jumps by 30%. Apart from Ankasaley, Uliya Kere and Gowri Kere, Moodbidri residents are also planning to revive Kadedabettu, Kalyani Kere, Basavana Kaje, and Aramane Bagilu Kere.



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An International Lake Conference held in 2016 had lauded the plans drawn up by the committee. Experts, including Dr. T V Ramachandra of Centre for Environmental Sciences at Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, had recommended that the central government constitute a 'Paryavaran Aayog', along the lines of NITI Aayog.

The conference also recommended identification of ecologically-sensitive units (at Panchayat levels) as per Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act 1986 (EPA), to improve ecosystem health through location-specific conservation practices such as the one in seen in Moodbidri. This could be helpful for Karnataka government, which has failed to adequately manage Bengaluru lakes—particularly the Bellandur lake.

The author is a Mangaluru-based freelance writer.

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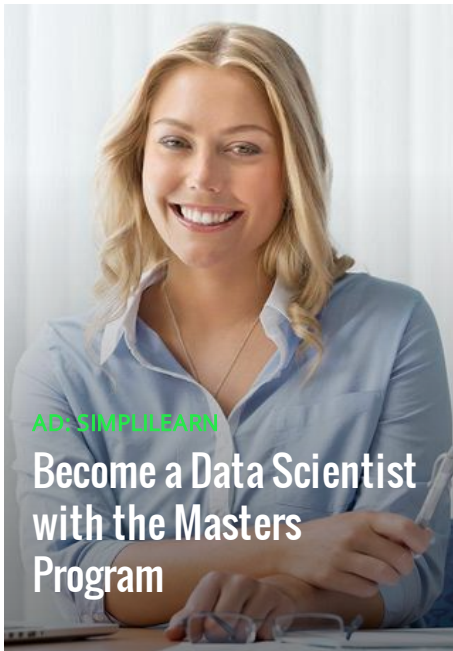
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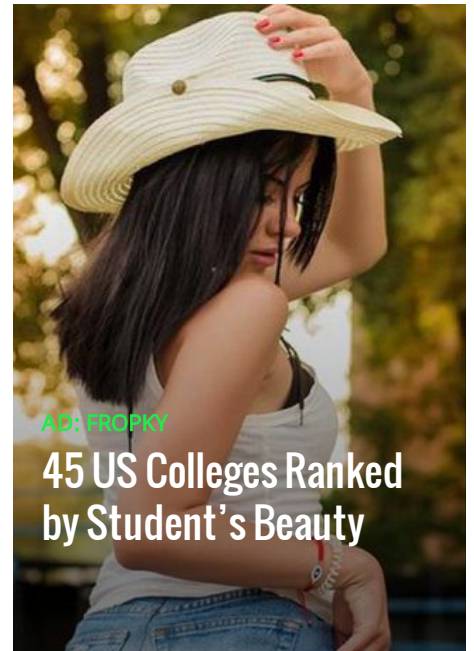
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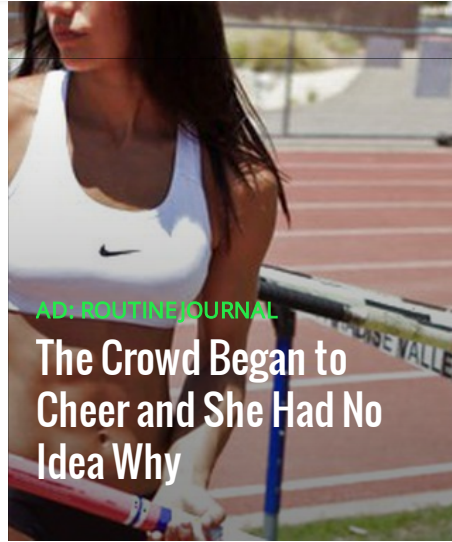


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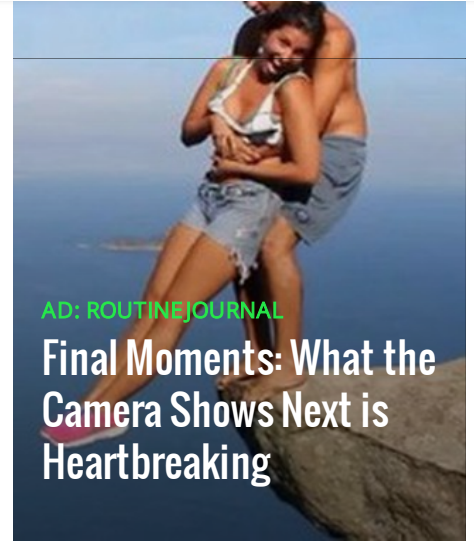
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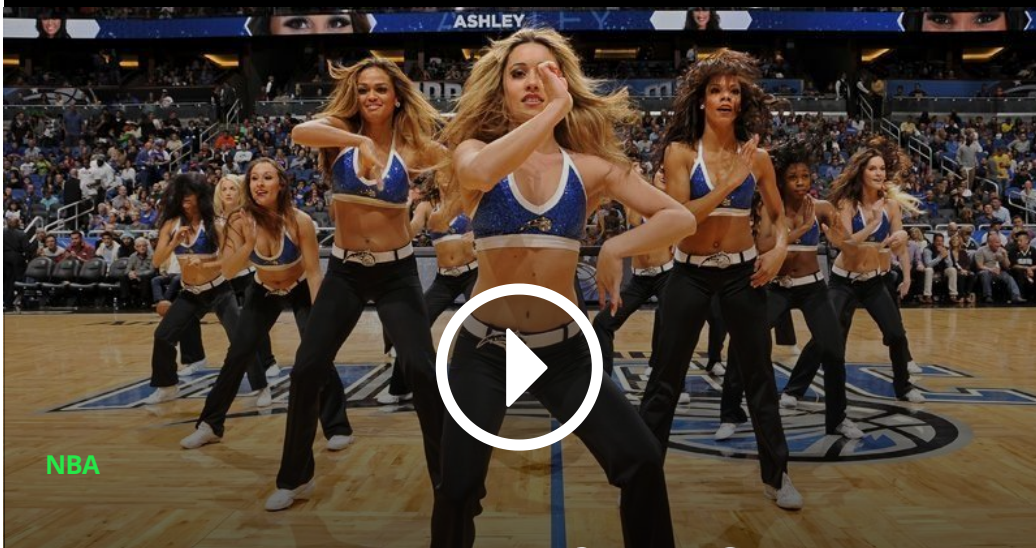


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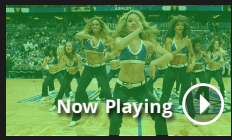


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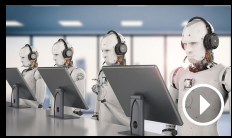
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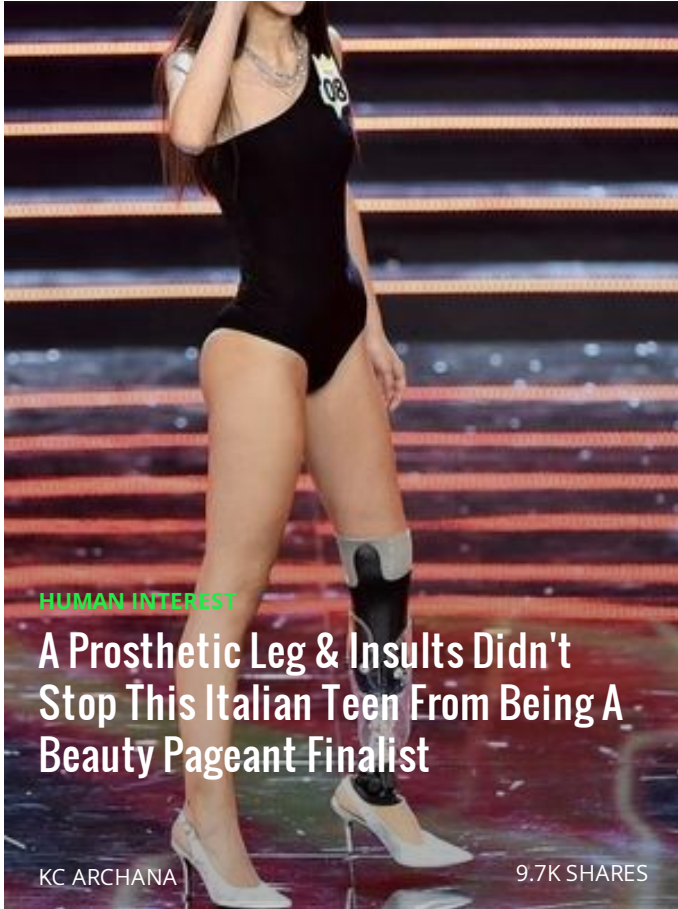
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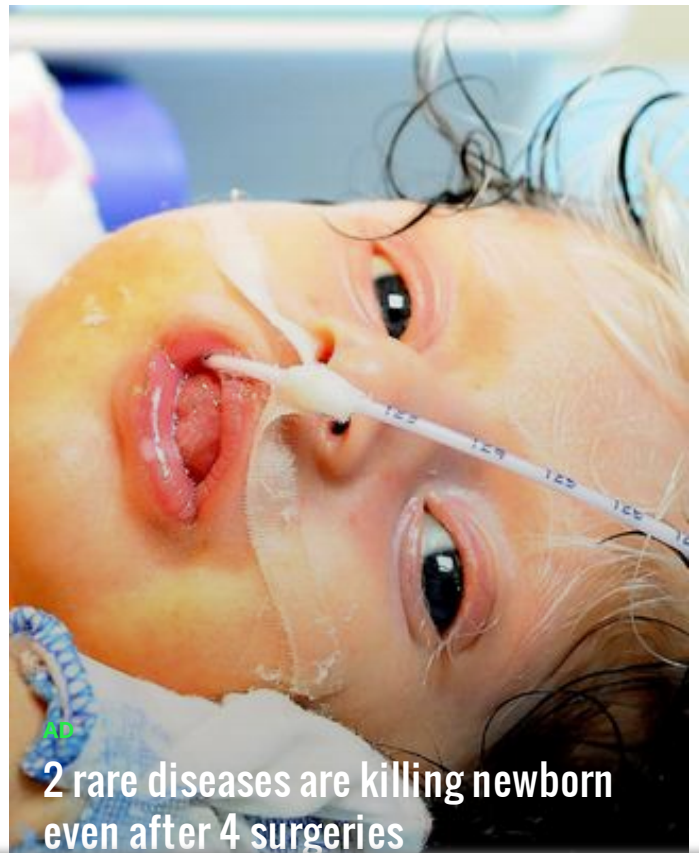
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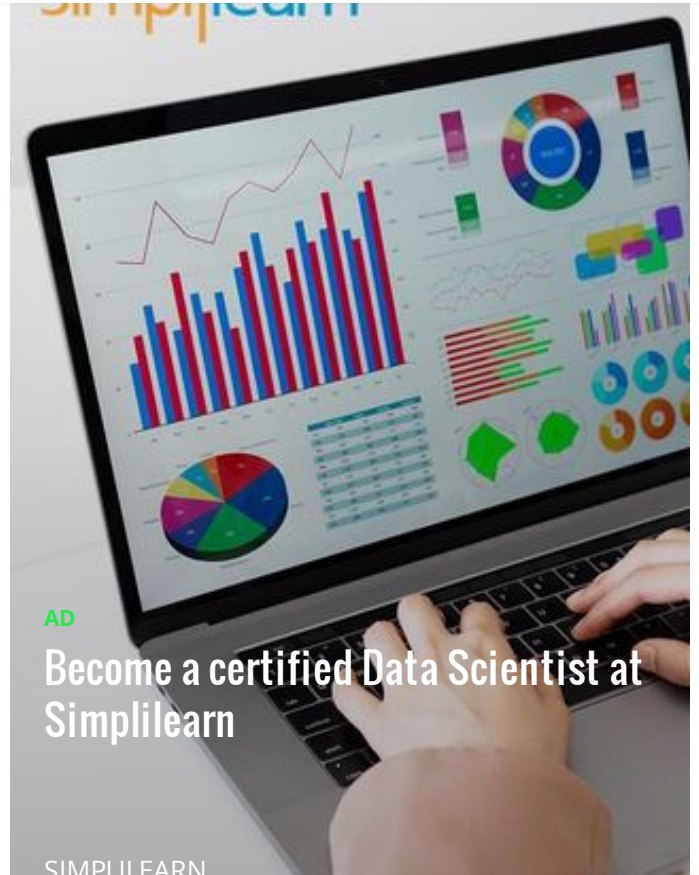
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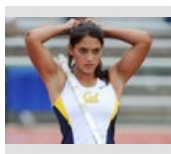
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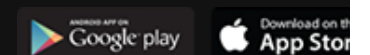
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