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Desert-ing our city

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The mention of Bengaluru brings back memories of cotton candy at Cubbon Park, jogging at Sankey Tank and walks through MG Road's picturesque boulevard. Five years down the line, these beautiful associations may just be replaced by that of a city which is unliveable — characterised by heat islands, where pure drinking water will become a luxury.

Scientists at the Indian Institute of Science predict a pathetic fate for Bengaluru. "Our analysis has shown that Bengaluru will be facing a severe water crisis in the next five years. The river Cauvery is unable to sustain the increasing demands of this city. There is over exploitation occurring in areas where the ground water is already less. Large scale building activity is taking place, regardless of the fact that resources are scarce in those areas," says Dr TV Ramachandra, faculty member, Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc. "Once water in the city gets depleted, the elite will turn to bottled water to meet their needs, and those below the poverty line will become victims of ground water contamination."

Environmentalists also foresee a similar destiny for our 'garden city'. Says Sunil Kumar M, "There is no effort being made to recharge ground water. Solid waste is being dumped into lakes. Trees across the city are being felled to widen roads and increase residential space. All this had led to the recent rise in temperature. In the next eight or 10 years, the city might turn into a desert."

These horrifying predictions are acting as a warning bell of sorts for youngsters in the city. Says Shashaank Abraham, a BBM student, "It is a scary thought, but it's not too late. If each one of us does our bit for the environment, we can salvage the situation."

Experts suggest measures that will help avert the disaster. Says Dr Ramachandra, "We need to address this issue seriously. Rainwater and surface water harvesting, proper waste management, and increasing the vegetation cover will help make matters better. There also needs to be efficient urban planning." Adds urban planner Deepta Sateesh, "There needs to be comprehensive planning in the city, state and the region — a consolidated vision, with respect to all the faculties that are involved in developing the city."

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