

ZONE OF CONTENTION: HULIMAVU BUFFER EATEN AWAY

BDA and BBMP officials are unclear about the extent of encroachment; marshals say many high-rise apartments are located close to the lake

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

SINCE the Hulimavu lake breached on Sunday, authorities have been at loggerheads and playing the blame game. Now, it has been found that the buffer zone of Hulimavu Lake was not maintained by Bangalore Development Authority (BDA). The lake was handed over to the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), recently.

According to BDA guidelines and master plan, at least a 30-metre buffer zone should be maintained around all water bodies. However, that's not the case in Hulimavu Lake. To make matters worse, the BDA and BBMP officials are both uncertain of the extent of encroachment. Mayor N Goutham Kumar on Tuesday had informed Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa that 18 acres of the 148-acre water body was encroached upon. However, no one is sure of the buffer zone.

Ward marshals on duty in Bommanahalli and those working on the lake since Sunday, said that the buffer zone in most places is absent. It is not just the economically weak that have encroached upon the buffer zone, but many high-rise apartment complexes can also be seen in close proximity to the lake. Any layman can clearly say that 30-metre distance has not been kept from the lake boundary. "In fact, water has gushed into most of the houses of those people who have not maintained the buffer and most of them are illegal constructions. It is the fault of the BDA and BBMP officials who have turned a

blind eye to this," a marshal, who did not want to be named, told TNIE.

Prof T V Ramachandra, from Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc said: "The 30-metre buffer zone is absent around this lake and most of the lakes. This was also pointed out in the report handed over to the government in 2016, but the government did nothing about it. It is a crime under the Water Act, 1974, and it is also contempt of National Green Tribunal orders, to construct anything on the buffer zone and the wetland. But the BBMP, BDA and even Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) have ignored this."

He added that in 2016, the researchers had pointed to the government, with maps, of the 9.25-acre encroachment in Hulimavu Lake. This in fact, according to the government itself, has doubled. This explains that BDA and BBMP officials turned a blind eye to all encroachments.

Experts say it is also ironic that, on one side, the government has announced Rs 50,000 as immediate cash compensation and has announced to spend Rs 5 lakh to construct homes, but on the other hand, it has also announced to clear encroachers.

D Randeep, Zonal Commissioner, Bommanahalli, admitted that a 30-metre buffer zone should be maintained and added that the maps need to be studied. He assured to check it and clear all encroachments. "Lake stability and safety is very important. The legal stand will also be checked," he said.



According to BDA guidelines, at least a 30-metre buffer zone should be maintained around all water bodies, which is missing in Hulimavu Lake; (right) India Canteen staffers serve meals to the residents of Krishna Layout, which is near the lake. Most of them lost their ration and belongings due to the breach on Sunday | **INAGARAJA GADDEKA**



Christ students come to rescue of residents

IFFATH FATIMA @ Bengaluru

STUDENTS of Christ Deemed-to-be University in Bannerghata Road did their bit to help those who were affected by the Hulimavu Lake breach.

A day after the lake breach, some students of Christ University inspected Krishna Layout. "When we came on Monday to check on the houses, most of them were still flooded with dirty water. All their grocery was damp and the place was full of slushy. We counted 60 affected houses that needed help and announced this in our college," said Rohit Kumar, 3rd year economics student and a member of Centre for Social Action.

Boxes were set up in the school campus, where students could donate whatever they liked and even give cash. In just two days, the students collected Rs 30,000 and bought grocery and other daily requirements. These were handed over to the residents.

"We made separate kits for every family. Each kit had a set of biscuits, 5kg rice, 1kg dal, 2kg ragi, one packet oil, sanitary pads, toothpaste, toothbrush and soaps. When they received this, they had huge smiles on their faces, which made us very happy," said Ritvik A R, BBA student, member of Centre for Social Action.

This apart, clothes, blankets and utensils were also given. The students now plan to carry out this drive for a few more days.

Police yet to nab accused

Bengaluru: The Hulimavu police are investigating the lake breach case and are yet to arrest the accused in the case. Police said that several people need to be questioned and it would take some more time. "Since the beginning of the probe, it has been a blame game between the BBMP and BWSB officials.

There are two agencies involved and also private parties like contractors. We need to question a few others and only then can we arrive at a conclusion," an official said. The police had already questioned BWSB Assistant Engineer Karthik, who has been named as the accused in the FIR, and later BBMP Assistant Engineer Shilpa, based on the statement of Karthik. Besides, the police had also grilled home guards, driver and staff of an earthmover that was at the spot during the time of incident. ENS

PROBE LAKE BREACHES, PREVENT THEM IN FUTURE, HC TELLS STATE

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

TAKING serious note of three lake breaches that took place in the city including Hulimavu Lake, the Karnataka High Court on Wednesday directed the state government, Bangalore Development Authority and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike to

take immediate steps to prevent repetition of such incidents.

The division bench of Chief Justice Abhay Shreenivas Oka and Justice Pradeep Singh Yerur directed the state government to conduct inquiries into the collapse of retaining walls of Hulimavu, Hosakerehalli and Doddabidarakallu lakes

and submit reports.

These directions were issued after hearing the interlocutory application filed by advocate G R Mohan on behalf of the petitioner Geetha Misra, seeking directions to the DG&IGP to constitute a special investigation team to probe the alleged negligence of authorities in relation to collapse of retaining walls of lakes.

The court also directed the National Environmental Engineering and Research Institute (NEERI) to examine the three incidents where the retaining walls of the lakes collapsed. Meanwhile, the court asked the KSPCB to inform whether it is ready to surrender the Saneguruvamahalli Lake area, on which the board had constructed buildings, if NEERI says that it is possible to restore the lake if the buildings are removed. The court was hearing a PIL relating to maintenance of stormwater drains and lakes.



Kids have a meal served by India Canteen on Wednesday | **INAGARAJA GADDEKA**

