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'Shrinking green cover is pushing mercury up'

dna correspondent @dnaofblr

Bangalore: A comprehensive study and mapping of trees in Bangalore, conducted by Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc, in association with Karnataka State Pollution (KSPCB) has revealed that Bangalore has lost most of its trees and vegetation cover. This has inferred as the chief reason for increasing temperature and depleting wetlands in city.

As per the study, the dense vegetation cover (which includes the tree) in Bangalore which was 68.27% in 1973 has come down to less than 25% in 2012. The water bodies have reduced from 3.4% during 1973 to less than 1% in 2012. The mapping of trees in Bangalore was done ward wise, using Global Positioning System (GPS) based on canopy delineation along with field data.

Areas like Shivajinagar, Chickpet, Kempapura Agrahara wards have less than 0.002 trees per person (one tree for every 500 people). Other wards like Bellandur, Jakkur, Varthur, Agaram fared well, with more than one tree per person. Meanwhile, intra-city analysis of tree population showed that Gujarat's capital, Gandhinagar, has the most number of trees per person: 416 for every 100 people. Bangalore has 17 trees for every 100 people.

Dr TV Ramachandra, coordinator, Energy and Wetlands Research Group, Ecological Sciences, IISc, who had led the research, said: "There should be one tree per person. Trees helps in reducing the temperature and this has been quite evident in our IISc campus. We have about 22,000 trees for about 4,000 people. At any time, in IISc campus, temperature will be two degrees less compared with city temperature. Bangalore temperature has changed over the years. During 1835, Bangalore used to have temperature of 14-16°C at peak summer time, but now it has doubled to 38 degrees. All these are result of unplanned urbanisation and loss of tree cover."

He said the city has a literacy rate of 85.7%, but only about 3.5% people are environmentally literate.

Vaman Acharya, KSPCB chairman, said they would submit the study to the government and recommend taking up urban small forests projects. He said the urban development department of the BBMP should take up plantation on vacant government plots, apartments and hotels.

mybangalore@dnaindia.net

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