

## Is it snow? No, just pollution

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*Varthur Lake wore a glacial look after pollution covered it in foam*

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*Sewage, fertilisers, detergent and other pollutants leave Varthur Lake and residents 'frothing at the mouth'*

It's a glacier. It's an avalanche. No, it's froth from an overflowing lake. Residents near Varthur Lake were in for a surprise on Monday morning when froth started spilling onto road from the lake's north side discharge point.

While the froth served as a source of entertainment for children and motorists, others were seen stopping to take a quick picture of the foam which rose to nearly 6 ft in height and almost spilled on to the bridge and main road.

Until a few years ago, Varthur was a beautiful lake, prompting several IT personnel to take up apartments in Whitefield. It was a lifeline to several farming communities from Ramagondanahalli village near Whitefield.

However, unplanned urbanisation and industrialisation have led to the contamination of the flourishing and salubrious ecosystem.

Along with the distinction of being the second largest lake in Bengaluru, it has now earned the title for being the most polluted lake. What was then home to several indigenous fishes is now populated by invasive African Catfish.

"About 10 years ago, this was a beautiful place with fresh air to breathe. Now, the stench is unbearable. I am not against growth and Whitefield developing into an industrial hub. But the planning and maintenance of such ecosystems should have been given equal priority," said Ashish Chaudary, a resident of Varthur.

Being the last lake downstream of a network of large lakes that dot the city — including Bellandur and Agara — Varthur lake receives 40 percent of the city's sewage, i.e. around 500 million litres, says a research paper by the Energy and Wetlands Research Group at IISc.

The sewage that Varthur Lake receives is largely untreated, creating a hypertrophication — the nature's response to addition of artificial substances, mainly phosphates, through detergents, fertilisers or sewage to an aquatic system. This is due to inconsistent and poorly maintained sewage system.

People have stopped using this water for years. While some postulate that the frothing is due to the presence of excessive levels of phosphate from human urine in the water, others believe it's the detergents used for washing which cause the frothing.

With a new unnamed mall set to come up on the left side of this outlet, locals are fearing the worst.

Where the BDA, BBMP and Lake Development Authority failed, several NGOs like Whitefield Rising and a few others have been trying to put a brake on this rapid degradation by marking the pollution levels in the water and are trying to find sustainable solutions to prevent further pollution. Rajesh S, who runs a bakery, has similar things to say. "When we set up shop here, it was relatively clean. But with the stench, our business is also getting affected. People feel that our products might be contaminated, although we use water from a different locality," he said.

### **'Crack down on detergent cos'**

*Increase in temperature prompts evaporation reducing the water level. Also, when 500 million litres of both treated and untreated sewerage is let into the lake, froth spills over. It is largely due to the high-level of detergent in the sewerage water. Detergent companies use high doses of phosphorous in their products. The government must crack down on detergent companies and regulate the use of phosphorous. Otherwise pristine water bodies like this will only be a memory for our future generation*

*.— TV Ramachandra, senior IISc scientist*