

Graveyard, sewage, bus stand, froth and fire... all except water in Bengaluru lakes

By Niranjana Kaggere, Bangalore Mirror Bureau | Jun 30, 2015, 04.00 AM IST



Ulsoor Lake, one of the few well-maintained lakes in the city. The lake is maintained by Madras Sappers

The chain of lakes that once brought laurels to the IT city at the international level has turned out to be the latest nemesis for brand Bengaluru. Even as the froth-filled Bellandur Lake drew flak at the national level, a latest report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India not only revealed that most lakes in Bengaluru are polluted but also slammed the civic and water body conservation authorities for being 'weak' and 'ineffective' in preventing degradation of lakes.

The Performance Audit report on 'Conservation and Ecological restoration of Lakes under the jurisdiction of Lake Development Authority (LDA) and Urban Local Bodies' tabled in the state legislature on Monday slammed the authorities for weak institutional mechanisms and ineffective implementation of various programmes for the conservation and restoration of lakes.

Contrary to citizens' movement to conserve lakes in some parts of the city, the report by the CAG also disclosed that community participation over conservation of lakes is very minimal in

the IT city. Taking a dig at the LDA-overall monitoring agency on lakes, the report cited that the agency did not have any substantial authority and acted mainly as a mediator between the public and entities involved in conservation of lakes.

Most lakes polluted in Bengaluru

The CAG report disclosed that most water bodies in Bengaluru continue to remain polluted and efforts to reduce sewage entry into lakes remain inadequate. Closer evaluation of every lake revealed that sewage was the major source of pollution.

"Sewage treatment plants (STPs) do not have adequate capacity to treat the contaminated water fully and many of the existing plants also did not function effectively. The core activities including de-silting of tanks, formation of bunds and wetland construction were undertaken in a haphazard manner," the report observed.

The committee visited 10 lakes in and around Bengaluru and two lakes in other parts of the state to assess the quality of works and condition of biodiversity. Commenting on the condition of biodiversity, the report stated, "Despite restoration works, preservation of biodiversity was not adequate and it was evident in the loss of natural wetland with aquatic species and spread of invasive species. The agencies had not assessed the impact of pollution in lakes and its risks to human health and groundwater too."

While several encroachments persisted around the lakes, proper fencing of lake boundaries was also inadequate. The CAG, after verifying restoration works, discovered that lakes were more for recreation facilities rather than preservation of the ecosystem.

The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) was also found responsible to a certain extent causing pollution in lakes due to prolonged delay in executing underground drainage works and inadequate STPs. "Bengaluru consumes about 900 MLD of water, 80 per cent of which is let out as waste water. Though BWSSB had the capacity to treat 721 MLD in its existing STPs, only 521 MLD of waste water was treated and the remaining let into lakes directly," the CAG report revealed.

The BWSSB had set up STP at Dasarahalli Lake for a lesser capacity though the sewage entering the lake was 2.3 MLD.

However, the agency maintained that the sewage was assessed during dry weather season and hence the plant is lesser in capacity. At Vengaihanakere, though a 20 millions of litres per day plant was set up, the treated water was again let into storm water drain (SWD) filled with sewage. The BWSSB, however, during inspection by the CAG claimed that it was diluting the sewage by letting treated water into SWD. Similarly, the 40 MLD STP at Nagavara Lake was dysfunctional due to frequent power failures.

Civic agencies lacked coordination

It was not just KSPCB that failed in conservation of lakes but also major civic agencies like Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) and the Bangalore Development Authority

(BDA), which lacked coordination. The LDA, being the sole authority to conserve lakes, lacked teeth to exercise the bestowed powers.

"LDA operated with skeletal staff and has never been reviewed by the government since its inception in 2002. As the agency did not have statutory powers, there was laxity in exercise of powers," according to the report.

CAG team's visit to 34 lakes in Bengaluru found that there was no demarcation of lake area. "Out of the 34 lakes in Bengaluru, only three lakes (Dasarahalli, Kasavanahalli and Vibhutipura) were found to be demarcated. Signboards giving information about the lake area were seen only in seven lakes. Besides, there were variations in lake areas in various records.

Similarly, in BDA there was no department dedicated to lakes, according to the CAG report.

"The BDA was supposed to transfer lakes under their jurisdiction to BBMP for maintenance. However, even after communicating about the transfer, lakes were not handed over to BBMP citing financial constraints. BDA incurred `30.31 crore expenses to rejuvenate Jakkur, Rachenahalli and Venkateshapura lakes in 2010. As the transfer was not carried out, maintenance at these lakes was neglected," the report revealed.

Further, the BBMP incurred a cost of Rs 3.31 crore to fence the Bellandur Lake in 2009-12. Interestingly, the BDA too in 2012-13 had proposed to undertake fencing work at Bellandur at a cost of Rs 3.03 crore although the work is yet to take off.

Pollution Board in slumber

Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) — the pollution watchdog — according to the CAG report, has failed to contain rising pollution levels in the lakes of Bengaluru. "KSPCB was supposed to assess the quality of water in the lakes periodically and report to the agencies."

The board was to levy penalties on polluters of lakes.

The board, however, monitored pollution in only 120 out of the 36,568 lakes across Karnataka including 48 lakes in Bengaluru. Further, the KSPCB replied that they have filed a criminal case against BWSSB, which did not take any action against polluters of lakes like apartments that were pumping sewage directly into the water bodies like the Horamavu-Agara Lake.

Encroachment in major lakes

Lake - Encroachment

Amblipura Melinakere (BBMP) - Inlet encroached by Defence authorities

Amruthahalli (BDA) - A family settled within lake area

Attur (BBMP)- Asphalted road and raising of nursery

Bellandur (BDA) - 16 acres encroached

Dasarahalli (BBMP)- Road, slum, temple

Doddanekkundi (BDA)- Road, children's park and temple

Horamavu-Agara (BDA)- Encroached for forming bus stand

Jakkur (BDA)- Road inside the lake

Kaigondanahalli (BBMP) -Auditorium, a school using lake area as playground

Kalkere-- Ramapura (BDA)- Graveyard inside the lake

Kasavanahalli (BBMP)- Inlet encroached by apartment builders

City lakes as found by the CAG

**Nagavara Lake is the only lake in Bengaluru , which had a natural wetland formation but filled with water hyacinth and debris*

** The state government ordered that tanks should be restored to their original status. Defying the order, planting of trees was carried out on the lakebed of seven lakes in Bengaluru*

** Trees were cut indiscriminately at Kaigondanahalli to lay sewerage pipes*

** Invasive species like water hyacinth was common in all lakes of Bengaluru. The plant doubles itself within four-weeks*

**BBMP spent Rs 9.83 lakh to remove hyacinth*

**Chikka Bellandur Lake had no inlets and thus the entire lake dried up*

** A residential apartment is pumping untreated sewage directly into this lake*

**BWSSB's UGD line inside Vengaihanakere Lake was found overflowing, mixing sewage with water*

** The Forest department built staff quarters inside the lake area at Allalassandra Lake*

** At Allalassandra Lake, Rs 7.58 crore was spent on non-core works like boat jetty without boats, island construction without plants*

** The lessee at Nagavara Lake has provided restaurants, water-theme parks and motor boats, thereby polluting the lake*

** An amphitheatre is built inside the lakebed of Kaigond-anahalli Lake*