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Bengaluru: Builders threaten members of National Green Tribunal

Deccan Chronicle | Amit S. Upadhye | September 16, 2015, 03.04 am IST



Bellandur lake

Bengaluru: In a sign that the battle between environmentalists and real estate mafia was taking a turn for the worse, two members of the National Green Tribunal (GIT) who were on a field visit at the water catchment area of Agara and Bellandur Lakes were abused by a group of people working for a real estate major in the area.

The incident happened last Friday, on September 11, when members of GIT were visiting the project sites of Mantri Tech Zone and Coremind Sofreware Limited at Agara and Jakkasandra village on Sarjapur Road. According to the complaint copy, which has been made available to Deccan Chronicle, a person named Mr Chidambaram, who was wearing a security uniform snatched the GPS equipment from one of the senior scientists of the visiting team and also used abusive language against the members.

The GPS unit was taken away by other individuals who were repeatedly asking the members to leave the site. The GPS unit was returned only after the entire data was deleted. A detailed complaint has been submitted to the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) and to

the Convenor, NGT Committee.

The complaint also stated that the members have now requested for security during the field visits which involves litigation with the major real estate companies. The GIT had ordered the resurvey of Agara-Bellandur catchment area as the various reports submitted by the KSPCB, Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Board (KIADB), sanctioned the project, despite a Supreme Court order directing it not to allow construction on the lake catchment areas.

Hence it had ordered a resurvey of the area. One of the members who was attacked said that the important data which was stored in the GPS unit had been deleted. "We repeatedly told the individuals who were abusing us that we have been come here on the directions of the court but they did not pay any attention and went on to take away the GPS unit. We had stored numbers of data from the last few years in the same GPS unit which was snatched away. We are now requesting security for the next field visit."

Social activist Mr S R Hiremath condemned the attack on the survey members and called urgent intervention of government. "It's the responsibility of the state government to ensure protection to the people who are fighting to save a public property," he said.

This is not the first time something like this is being reported in Bengaluru. In 2011 senior IFS officer, Mr U V Singh was attacked at Nagawara lake when he objected to a group of people, dumping waste in the lake.

Experts: Govt should protect catchments of all lakes in city

Wetland experts are shocked that the surveyors from the National Green Tribunal were attacked and threatened by some builders' men recently. They have demanded that the government should take a relook at the projects that are coming up in the water catchment area of all the lakes across Bengaluru.

The incident occurred on September 11 when Tribunal members were visiting the project sites of Mantri Tech Zone and Coremind Sofreware Limited at Agara and Jakkasandra village on Sarjapur Road. The projects have been opposed by the Resident Welfare Association and the scientists from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc).

In fact, a recent report prepared by the Wetland and Energy Research Group of IISc shows that apart from wetland destruction, the storm water drain has been encroached with construction debris, and another drain is now being encroached gradually.

The satellite data over the Agara-Bellandur lakes in the last one decade shows gradual increase in the built-up area as the government departments sanctioned residential and commercial projects to come up in the sensitive wetland area of the city. Both Agara and Bellandur are important water bodies which are linked to balance excess flow of rainwater.

"The courts have directed in the past that no construction should be allowed in lake catchment areas, which are an important part of lake ecology and they act as a flood plain. The altering of the same will lead to the frequent flooding in the neighbourhood," said a wetland expert.

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NGT should get a minimal security force and should not be let begging for action and security. There should also get the authority to arrest people who interfere in their duty.

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SN

Sriram Narayanaswamy

The government must take proactive action to end this at least now that the citizens have managed to get a positive response from the NGT. But of course, the builder *is* the government(whoever is in power), so that won't happen...

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