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NGT drops contempt case after Mantri MD apologises

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An SEZ is being developed on over 80 acres between Agara and Belandur lakes.— FILE PHOTO : Sudhakara Jain

Some people had snatched equipment from experts checking the legality of construction on wetlands

After an apology from Mantri Developers for having snatched equipment from experts who were checking the legality of construction on the Belandur wetlands, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) dropped a contempt petition against the builder.

On September 11, the GPS device of T.V. Ramachandra, a scientist who was part of an NGT-appointed expert committee, was snatched by personnel present at the controversial Special Economic Zone — jointly developed by Mantri Developers and Core Mind Software Services Pvt. Ltd. — at the wetlands. Namma Bengaluru Foundation and Forward Foundation had filed a case of contempt. During the hearing on October 5, NGT Chairperson Swatanter Kumar summoned Mantri Developers Managing Director Sushil Mantri. The next day, the MD and his legal advisor submitted that the member had been “requested not to take the GPS to the meeting and later, on the same was returned to him.” They tendered an unconditional apology for the “altercation” and added that they “regret” the incident. The bench then disposed the proceedings against Mantri.

The SEZ is being developed on over 80 acres between Agara and Belandur lakes. Activists have taken them to court over allegations of environmental violations and encroachment. Earlier in May, the two builders were fined Rs. 140 crore for violations, an order that has been stayed by the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, with the expert members of the NGT having submitted their report, the Tribunal will begin day-to-day hearing on the legality of the SEZ on November 4. The two NGT expert members had been sent to ascertain the legality and damage to the wetlands due to the SEZ after the tribunal lambasted the report of the expert committee.

With the froth at Belandur lake drawing ire online and on the ground, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has directed BBMP Commissioner G. Kumar Naik to take all steps to contain the foam. He called Mr. Naik on Thursday and asked him to look into the matter personally and submit an action taken report. He also asked the BBMP to chalk a long-term strategy for the beleaguered lake.