

Study blames industrial effluents for Varthur Lake froth

TNN | Jun 6, 2015, 06.43AM IST

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Pavana V, a 15-year-old student from Varthur, east Bengaluru, knows the froth in Varthur Lake has a high concentration of phosphorous, heavy metals and other chemicals. She also knows that these pollutants are released by industries in the neighbourhood and are contaminating borewells within one km of the city's second largest water body.

The authorities, however, seem oblivious to these facts. Not one of the 100-odd industries in the area is yet to be put on notice for the violation. Pavana is part of a group of students from KK English School, Varthur, which is studying the water body. Their endeavour itself is a part of a study conducted by IISc scientists on a request of an association of Whitefield residents - Whitefield Rising -to look into the heavy frothing in Varthur Lake.

The study has concluded that the foam is caused due to discharge of effluents by industries in Bellandur catchment area, as well as untreated sewage.

Analyses of samples collected by the IISc's Energy and Wetlands Research Group shows 74.59 mg phosphorous per litre, where there should be none. Nitrate is as high as 129.72 mg per litre against the acceptable 45 mg per litre. They concluded that only industrial affluent can cause this.

"Frothing is caused by pollutants settled as sediments. They churn following strong winds and heavy rainfall, resulting in the froth," said TV Ramachandra, professor of ecological sciences at the school. He was sharing the findings of the study with the students.

He said the fire in the water body was not caused by methane but a mixture of phosphate and other industrial effluents. "But of course someone must set fire to it. It won't catch fire on its own. This fire has brought attention to this 10 year-old froth problem," he said.

The three lakes in this area -Varthur, Bellandur and Challaghatta -receive 500 million litres of untreated sewage every day. "The city planners prohibited buildings in the buffer area. But this has been grossly violated," Ramachandra said.

Elangovan K, a member of Whitefield Rising, said funds will be raised for setting up a water testing laboratory in the area. "We have asked the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board to identify industrial polluters to take further action," he said.