

The legislature committee report has thrown up worrying statistics on encroachment of lakes on Bengaluru's outskirts

DEVANAHALLI

LAKES

Number of lakes: **117**
 Un-encroached lake: 1
 Encroachment extent (private): **1,446.35 acres**

Percentage of lake area lost owing to encroachment (govt. and private): **24.2**

2,014
 Lake encroachers

GROWTH TAKES OFF WITH AIRPORT

Drivers of growth: Kempegowda International Airport, elevated expressway towards Devanahalli

Estimated population in 2016: **2.28 lakh**

Population growth (2001 to 2016): **23.04%**

HOSKOTE

LAKES

Number of lakes: **192**
 Un-encroached lake: 13
 Encroachment extent (private): **2,430.38 acres**

Percentage of lake area lost due to encroachment (govt. and private): **31.55**

3,056
 Lake encroachers

GROWTH TAKES OFF WITH AIRPORT

Drivers of growth: Major IT firms and large-scale residential projects in Whitefield, Hoskote Industrial Estate

Estimated population in 2016: **2.91 lakh**

Population growth (2001 to 2016): **31%**

City's growth gobbles up rural lakes

MOHIT M. RAO
 BENGALURU

As the tentacles of the city spread across the rural plains, the first victims, it seems, are the lakes.

The progress report of the Joint Legislature Committee on Lake Encroachments, headed by K.B. Koliwad, throws up worrying statistics when it comes to lakes on the city's outskirts.

While the core areas of the city have seen around 14 per cent of their lake area encroached, two neighbouring taluks that have witnessed rapid expansion in the past decade have seen more than one-fourths of their lake area disappear.

The research of Indian Institute of Science ecologist TV. Ramachandra — who looked at the spatial growth of the city for the past four decades — shows that the city's biggest growth areas have been in north (Devanahalli towards the international airport) and the east (International Tech Park Ltd. at Whitefield).

To put it in perspective, the tabulated private encroachment in just Devanahalli and Hoskote taluks is nearly 3,900 acres, or around 600 acres more than what is lost in seven other taluks that comprise Bengaluru Urban and Bengaluru Rural districts. And unlike Bengaluru Urban district, where a sizeable number of 'encroachments' came through government action of formation of layouts and construction of bus stations and stadiums, the encroachments in these taluks seem to be primarily by private entities.

Water conservationist S. Vishwanath believes that while the extent of encroachment was surprising, it was along expected lines. Devanahalli taluk, for instance, sees lower rainfall, and lakes tend to dry off fast. "And dried up lakes are ripe for encroachment ... much of the encroachments are recent and have occurred over the past decade," he said.

Vijayapura and Dandiganahalli lakes have entirely turned into farmlands; while, Bettakote lake adjacent to Kempegowda International Airport is seeing layouts and farms eating into its tank-bed.

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"When lakes are disappearing in the city in front of our eyes, the effect is worse on the outskirts, where lakes are frequently breached and filled up. Unfortunately, when we wake up to it, a majority of them would have gone," he said.

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A file photo of Doddakere in Hoskote. Two taluks neighbouring Bengaluru city that have witnessed rapid expansion in the past decade have seen more than one-fourths of their lake area disappear.

105 lakes studies in and around Bengaluru

25 lakes have little or no water

98% of lakes have seen encroachment

90% are fed by sewage

Low pollution: 24 lakes, includes Ulsoor, Agara, Hebbal, Rachenahalli, Hesaraghatta, Yelahanka, and Doraikere lakes

Moderately polluted: 22 lakes, includes Hemmigeppura, Madiwala, Lalbagh, Sankey, Dasarahalli, Kaikondrahalli, and Jakkur lakes

Highly polluted: 34 lakes, includes Begur, Doddanekundi, K.R. Puram, Allalasaandra, Varthar, Bellandur, and Arekere lakes

90 per cent of lakes are fed by sewage

MOHIT M. RAO
 BENGALURU

The encroachments listed out in the status report by the Joint Legislature Committee could just be the tip of the iceberg.

While the committee believes 89.25 per cent of lakes in and around Bengaluru have seen some sort of encroachment, a recent study by a team from Indian Institute of Science (IISc.) shows that 98 per cent of lakes have lost land.

The team, led by TV. Ramachandra of the Energy and Wetlands Research Group of the IISc., studied

105 lakes in the city and found that 90 per cent see sewage flowing into them. Of these, 25 were covered by water hyacinth — an indicator of the sewage flow — throughout the year.

The water quality of the lakes was so bad that just 2 per cent of the lakes come under the Central Pollution Control Board standards for drinking water, while a staggering 80 per cent resemble wastewater fit only for industrial use. Similarly, just one in five lakes can support a thriving fish population.

The study believes that sewage continued to flow unabated and often un-

treated into lakes owing to the low functioning of the BWSSB's sewage treatment plants. Out of a designed capacity of 721 MLD, less than half — barely 302 MLD

of sewage — was undergoing treatment before being released into the city's storm-water drains, rivers and lakes.

Consequently, the worst

affected series of lakes are those in Koramangala-Chalaghatta valley, resulting in the severe pollution seen in the lakes such as Bellandur and Varthar.

CELEBRATING LAKES



PHOTO: V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

The first 'kere habba' (lake festival) was conducted on the banks of the 43-acre Kaikondrahalli lake on Saturday. Workshops, bird walks, competitions and games for children, music, film screening, and yoga marked the festival, which not only hoped to create awareness on the importance of lakes but also to raise funds for the upkeep of the waterbody.

Meanwhile, at Sankey Tank, hundreds of students and artists came together to sketch their hopes and disappointments of the city's waterbodies. Ripples, organised by Art Matters, hoped to create awareness on endangered lakes of the city.

Deadline for setting up special courts

STAFF REPORTER
 BENGALURU

The Anti-Land Grabbing Struggle Committee, led by freedom fighter H.S. Doreswamy, has set a January 18 as the deadline for the government to set up special courts to try land-grabbers under the Karnataka Land Grabbing (Prohibition) Act, 2011.

The Karnataka Land Grabbing (Prohibition) Bill got the Presidential assent in October 2014 and the government announced a year ago that it will set up special courts to try land-grabbing cases. But no court has been set up yet. A.T. Ramaswamy, who chaired the Joint Legislature Committee that reported on encroachment of government land in Bengaluru, said: "The K.B. Koliwad report clearly names those who have encroached lakes in the city. My report has been lying with the government and no action has been taken. The government needs to set up special courts and try all the encroachers named in the two reports immediately. Steps need to be taken to recover these lands."

The Anti-Land Grabbing Struggle Committee had held a 39-day protest in September 2014 demanding special courts to try land-grabbing cases.

Work begins on Hoodi Halt railway station

STAFF REPORTER

BENGALURU: The protests demanding a halt railway station at Hoodi for the last one year culminated in the beginning of the work on the project on Saturday.

Hoodi Halt railway station that will come up between K.R. Puram and Whitefield railway stations will help more than 20,000 techies commuting to the area every day. Now one can travel from Bengaluru City, Bengaluru Cantonment and Byappanahalli railway stations on Bangarpet Passenger or Marikuppam Passenger trains to Hoodi and avoid the crippling traffic snarls on Outer Ring Road and K.R. Puram to reach their workplaces.

P.C. Mohan, Bengaluru (Central) MP, laid the foundation stone for the station work on Saturday. Presently, most of the techies who travel by train have to get down at the good-shed yard, where trains stop briefly. The regular commuters had sent several petitions demanding a halt station at Hoodi and had even staged protests in December 2014. They found support in Mr. Mohan, who sanctioned Rs. 1.74 crore from his MPLAD funds for the project.

Man 'cuts off' his finger as 'offering'

STAFF REPORTER

BENGALURU: In a bizarre incident, a 35-year-old man met Housing Minister M.H. Ambareesh at his J.P. Nagar residence here on Saturday, claiming to have cut off his finger as an "offering" at Tirupati after Congress president Sonia Gandhi and vice-president Rahul Gandhi were given bail in the National Herald case.

The youth, Suresh, a businessman from Mandya, was seen with a bandaged palm. He claimed to be a Congress worker and a fan of Mr. Ambareesh. The Minister is said to have admonished Suresh.

FIRST VICTIMS

waterbodies

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