

TIME RUNS OUT Bengaluru needs a long-term overhaul to save itself from floods

Wake Up Siddhu: City's Awash in Govt Apathy

Our Bureau

Bengaluru: The crippling of public infrastructure and disruption of normal life due to rain have industry leaders and experts calling for a holistic and long-term action plan to prevent such disasters in the future.

Coming as it did after a prolonged drought, the rain was expected to bring cheer. But the wettest year demonstrated just how fragile its infrastructure and how unprepared its administration is.

Sixteen persons have died in rain-related incidents since May. Five of them were washed away on the night of Oct 13 alone. In the 60 days, Bengaluru experienced rain on 50 days. The city's meteorological history was rewritten over the weekend: 2017 became the wettest year, having recorded 1,655.7 mm of rainfall (with two months to go), beating 2005's 1606.8 mm record.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, chairman and managing director of Biocon, said this "disastrous rainfall" should be an opportunity for the state government to come out with a holistic action plan. "It could be about clearing encroachments of drains to desilting them. All of this should be done on a war-footing. The government should also hold the contractor responsible for building a road which does not last beyond one year," she said.

Bhaskar Bhat, managing director of Titan, admitted that although cities around the world get affected due to extreme weather, governments should take up major overhaul of their infrastructure. "These are no short-term solutions. TenderSURE roads have turned out to be good while all others roads are in poor condition. Same is the case with storm water drain and sewage network. The government should embark on long-term solutions," he said.

Some experts believe removal of encroachments and restoration of lakes and drains will solve "half of Bengaluru's problems" while others suggest extreme measures such as razing down layouts that have come up on lakes.

Prof TV Ramachandra of the Indian Institute of Science believes that the government should go back to the basics. "Wetlands should be recovered from encroachers and rejuvenated," he said, pointing out that Koramangala was flooded because



Floodwaters have not receded near the Ecospace office complex.
- N NARASIMHA MURTHY

the wetland between Agara lake and Bellandur lake was choked because of illegal dumping.

"All lakes should be taken from BBMP and BDA and handed over to one government agency. The body should be given the powers to mercilessly evict those who have encroached lakes and drains," he said.

BBMP's chief engineer (Bommanahalli zone) Sidde Gowda, who was in charge of storm water drains until recently, suggested an extreme solution: "Bengaluru needs a dictatorship. The lakes are encroached and so is the network of storm water drains. We demolished several encroachments but there are many more. Wherever lakes were converted into layouts, new lakes should be developed," Gowda said. Building new storm water drains and lakes is the need of the hour, he stressed.

Urban expert Ashwin Mahesh believes that the city need not depend

on the Cauvery for drinking water if the rainwater is harvested. "The government should come out with a strong policy that enforces water harvesting in every house," he said.

MN Thippeswamy, a member of International Water Association, said countries such as Japan, Germany, France and Singapore were tackling floods by constructing large-scale underground reservoirs. "Flood water is diverted to these reservoirs. In Germany alone, there are 13 reservoirs. We should take a cue from these countries," he said.

Mahendra Jain, additional chief secretary, Urban Development Department, said the government would identify vulnerable parts which see recurring incidents of flooding and diagnose them with long-term solutions.

Meanwhile, there was a let-up in rain since Sunday evening. However, the submerged portion of the outer ring road near Ecospace continued to disrupt traffic. This stretch is home to several IT companies, which together employ over five lakh people.

"The road was flooded on Sunday itself but the BBMP did nothing to clear it. They started removing debris from the drain only today," said Prashanth Hoizal, an infrastructure

WHAT THE BIG GUNS SAY...

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Several IT companies on the ORR, which was flooded following a breach in the nearby Saul Kere, allowed employees to work from home.

"We didn't invoke our business continuity plan in Mumbai during the flooding there. But in Bengaluru, if it rains for an hour you start wondering about the people who will show up on time. This city needs better infrastructure," the CEO of a BPO company located on the ORR told ET.

An executive with one of the largest IT companies said: "We have work-from-home policies and people can leverage those. But it cannot be that the entire company can work from home. You have to be sensible and you can leave early. It's ok to wade through a little water. It is just rain."