

**DH Spotlight:** Experts, officials discuss solutions for Bellandur, Varthur lakes

# Panel formed to revive city's dying waterbodies, says K J George

**BENGALURU:** Environment experts and government officials on Saturday deliberated on the state of Bellandur and Varthur lakes.

The occasion was 'DH Spotlight' on 'Bringing Bellandur and Varthur Lakes Back to Life' at East Cultural Association in Indiranagar.

Minister for Bengaluru Development and Town Planning K J George said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had always been concerned about the lakes not just in Bengaluru but also across the state and had convened meetings at Vikasa Soudha.

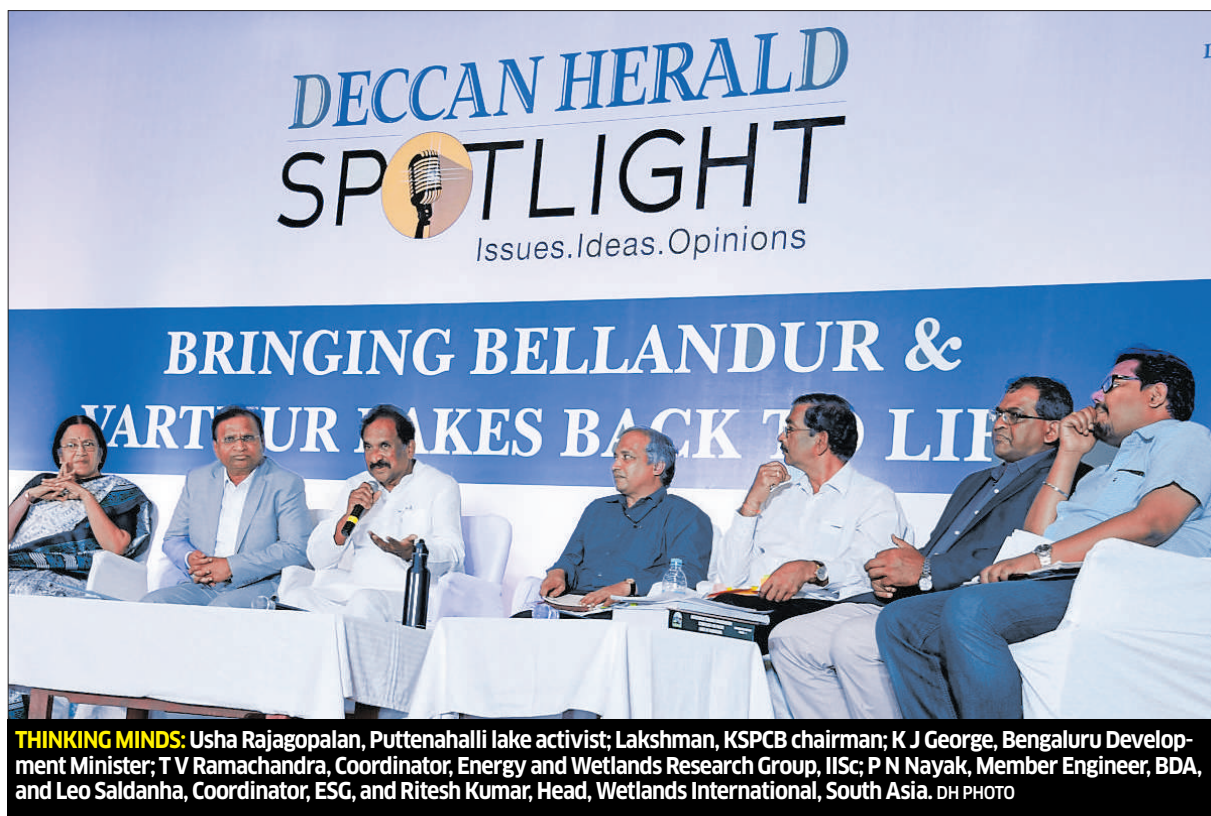
"A committee led by additional chief secretary in Urban Development Department Mahendra Jain was formed to revive Bellandur and Varthur lakes, which decided to carry out weeding and aeration. An implementation committee headed by the BDA commissioner has been constituted," said George.

He said the two sewage treatment plants (STP) set up in Bellandur will be operational by July and four more will be installed in the coming months.

"We cannot improve the lake overnight. It may take at least two to three years," said the minister.

He refuted reports that the fire in Bellandur lake earlier in January was due to a chemical reaction. "If the fire was because of a chemical reaction, then the entire lake would have been burning. The fact is that there was a small patch of dry grass, which caught fire."

He junked the notion that the government acted because



**THINKING MINDS:** Usha Rajagopalan, Puttenahalli lake activist; Lakshman, KSPCB chairman; K J George, Bengaluru Development Minister; T V Ramachandra, Coordinator, Energy and Wetlands Research Group, IISc; P N Nayak, Member Engineer, BDA, and Leo Saldanha, Coordinator, ESG, and Ritesh Kumar, Head, Wetlands International, South Asia. DH PHOTO

of the NGT order. "We always wanted to revive the lake. We took the responsibility of protecting lakes and formed the Karnataka Lake Conservation and Development Authority (KLCDA).

**'Other lakes matter, too'** KSPCB chairperson Lakshman said the concern should not be limited to Bellandur and Varthur lakes but also other lakes like Byramangala. He said the city was paying the price of rapid urbanisation and that precautions should have been

taken long back.

BDA engineer member P N Nayak explained about the various measures taken by the BDA to restore the lake. He said at least 3,000 tonnes of weeds have been removed and the remaining will be removed soon. Three more harvesters and a floating crane would be roped in soon.

Dr Ritesh Kumar, conservation programme manager in Wetland International South Asia, said the lake and wetland conservation is a matter of concern and emphasised on an in-

tegrated development plan.

## Critical voices

IISc professor Dr T V Ramachandra criticised the government for waking up late. "Let us step out of the era of excuses. We often talk of inadequacies of infrastructure, but why do we reach a stage where things get out of hand?"

Ramachandra said the city receives enough rain to meet 70% of its water requirement but the need is to conserve it. He rued that dumping of debris was rampant in Bellandur and

Varthur lakes despite patrolling and monitoring through CCTV cameras.

Usha Rajagopalan, trustee in Puttenahalli Neighbourhood Lake Improvement Trust, told the audience about her experiments to protect the Puttenahalli lake. She said she lacked expertise like others on the panel but her perseverance resulted in revival of the Puttenahalli lake. She said reviving Bellandur and Varthur lakes could be possible if a serious attempt is made.

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Just weeding Bellandur lake will not help: Saldanha

**BENGALURU, DHNS:** Environment Support Group convener Leo Saldanha said the NGT was passing orders for quick-fix solutions as officials have failed to communicate the extent of the crisis in Bellandur lake.

"Closing down industries alone will not save Bellandur lake. Solid waste is dumped in stormwater drains. How can we expect the sewage treatment plants to work when the water they handle has so much of solid waste?" he asked.

Saldanha said clearing weeds does more harm than good. "Don't look at hyacinth as a disease. Hyacinth draws the excess nutrition in water. It basically treats sewage water. If you remove all weeds, then you are letting raw sewage into water," he said.

"I appeal to the NGT to consider the Justice N K Patil report which suggested lining the 840 km of storm water drains with trees, bamboos and grass shrubs. These will absorb all the waste, allowing only clean water to pass," he said.

He said every programme of the government agencies in saving lakes showed how incompetent officials have been in understanding the ecosystems. But such quick-fix solutions will not help in the long run. This is a systemic failure and it needs a systematic response," he said.

## Audience vie to be heard, fire a volley of questions

Activist calls for scientific solid waste management

**BENGALURU:** The third edition of 'Deccan Herald Spotlight' on Saturday saw the audience vying for a chance to fire questions at members of the panel.

Odette Katrak, an activist from Bellandur, asked BDA Member Engineer P N Nayak how does the agency plan to clean lakes without a proper solid waste management system. While Nayak said the BDA was working as per the suggestions of the expert committee, Leo Saldanha intervened to note that ward committees should be given powers and held accountable for maintenance of solid water drains.

Subba Rao, who came from Hyderabad to attend the programme, suggested that the civic agencies work with co-ordination. "Our cities are becoming time bombs. We are getting trapped in this system. Today many Bengalureans are forced to drink water from polluted lakes," he said, em-

**SUBBA RAO:** Our cities are becoming time bombs... Many Bengalureans are forced to drink water from polluted lakes.



**Odette Katrak, an activist from Bellandur**

phasising on synergy between agencies.

Alli Rani, a schoolteacher from Varthur, recalled how a mesh fence around Varthur lake fell on a bus carrying many children, including her daughter, trapping them for hours. "It was a horrible moment for us. I want to know what the government has done to prevent such incidents," she asked Bengaluru Development Minister K J George.

George replied that the incident was unfortunate but noted that the government had left lake conservation activities to experts. "We are not experts. Fencing and other activities are decided by technical experts. We will take note of this," he said.

Muralidhar Rao of Prajaraag said that about 350 metres of SWD near the Golf Course had been covered, causing flash floods during the rainy season. "Knowing the importance of the SWDs, how did the civic agencies permit such construction?" he asked.

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