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Your negligence is bursting its banks, BBMP!

DECCAN CHRONICLE. | ROHAN RAMESH (/byline/rohan-ramesh)

Publishedan 11, 2017, 3:22 am IST **Updated**an 11, 2017, 6:45 am IST

A lake management committee that represents all stakeholders including residents, must be set up, said Dr TV Ramachandra, IISC.



📷 We are keenly waiting and watching the developments. Obviously the move by the High Court is a good one, but we are waiting to see if any concrete action will be taken, says A member of Whitefield Rising

Do our authorities believe that ignoring a problem will make it go away? That certainly seems the case with Bellandur Lake and its foul-smelling froth. The High Court has finally stepped in, giving the government four weeks to clean up its mess, but experts and residents alike have their own apprehensions. It's time for sustained efforts to revive our city's lakes by stopping effluents at the source and ensuring that big apartment complexes and industries treat their own waste.

Once fed by its lakes, Bengaluru is today seeing them gradually die as they fall victim to the ever expanding urban jungle that is steadily taking over its lung spaces. The death of some water bodies is, however, more apparent than others. It's hard to miss the mess the Bellandur Lake is in, for instance, as saturated with pollutants, it has been frothing heavily, sending a white cloud of foam floating on to its surroundings and the roads nearby.

Although frothing for some time now, the government has done little to repair the damage caused to it by the effluents entering it and has merely left the people living nearby to suffer the smelly foam filling their immediate space. But help

seems to be at hand finally as the Karnataka high court has stepped in and given the government four weeks to restore and rejuvenate Bellandur.

The principal secretaries of the urban development, and ecology and environment departments have been given the responsibility by the bench, which summed its displeasure, saying "We are not happy" with the way the lake has been allowed to deteriorate.

Going by a scientist of the Indian Institute of Science and environmentalist T.V. Ramachandra, the frothing of the lake is caused by phosphorus. He believes its high time its use is banned in the country. "If phosphorus based detergents are banned by the government it will not only help lakes like Bellandur but also solve the problems of a massive river like Yamuna," he explains.

Dr. Ramachandra suggests a lake management committee with representation of all stakeholders, including the residents in the vicinity, must be set up maintain the lake once it is cleaned.

"Jakkur Lake is an ideal example. The lake was cleaned in 2002 and has been taken care off ever since. The Jakkur lake model can be adopted and used. If this is done then Bellandur Lake will surely get a new lease of life. But first steps must be taken to ensure no untreated sewage is released into it," he underlines.

Water conservationist, Vishwanath, too believes the solution lies in stopping effluents from entering both the Bellandur and Varthur lakes. "The source of effluent discharge must be found and stopped. The pollution control board must ensure this is done immediately and existing STPs must be set right or new STPs installed on priority so all untreated water can be diverted through them, thereby ensuring a clean lake," he says.

Noting that both Bellandur and Varthur lakes are

downstream of close to 42 tanks, he says the government needs to start with the topmost tank and work its way down to them. "Only then can we get a thorough job done," he stresses.

Living near the lake is unbearable: Residents

Ignored by the government and its agencies like the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board and the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board, the Bellandur Lake has turned into a huge sewage pit, swallowing over 500 million litres of it every day.

The result? Every time it rains, the lake begins to froth, leaving its surroundings both cloudy and smelly. Says Mr Mithun, a shopkeeper in its vicinity, "The lake overflows and the roads are filled with foam every time it rains. The stench is unbearable." Not convinced that the high court's intervention is likely to change anything, he smiles wryly and adds, "Let's wait and watch. Talk is good but some action is needed."

Mr Sarthak Chakraborty, a corporate professional, who moved to Yemalur a few years ago, likens the lake to a silent volcano that can erupt any time "Every time it rains or if the wind blows strongly, you can see the froth rising on it. If there is heavy rain, the situation worsens because the lake overflows and all the sewage and froth spills over on to the roads," he notes with disgust.

As for the high court's decision to appoint special officers to oversee Bellandur's cleaning, he says, "I hope it is done fast. I am tired of living near this lake. One day when it rained and some sewage water from the lake touched my skin, it began to itch. I am praying and hoping for the best."

Responding to the High Court's intervention, a residents' group, Whitefield Rising said in a statement, "We are keenly waiting and watching the developments. Obviously the move by the High Court is a good one." But the scepticism is hard to miss among the people in the area, who have waited long

for the government to come to their rescue and have been left disappointed so far.

'Industries, large apartments should treat their own waste'

Dr. A.N. Yellappa Reddy, former Secretary, Department of Environment

Around 200 to 250 MLD of untreated sewage enters the Bellandur Lake and this must stop. Construction of a treatment plant on the lake should help, but this requires political will . There is sadly, reluctance on the part of the government. Though the High Court has now ordered that the lake be cleaned in four weeks, this should have been done two years ago.

I think that a good way to go about this would be to identify apartments near the HSR Layout, Bellandur area, Ulsoor and the like and make it mandatory for them to treat the waste water they release. They must be monitored and held accountable. Industries, which have treatment plants that don't work, must invite serious action.

We need to identify industries near Varthur and Bellandur, whether they be small scale , electroplating industries or government-run units and make sure their waste is treated before it enters the storm water drains.

Technology to get the lake cleaned is available and though it may be a little expensive, the investment must be made to save Bengaluru. Again this will take political will to accomplish.

Also areas around the lakes should be converted into wetlands which will not only beautify them, but also take on heavy metals naturally. Banning phosphorous- based detergents , if not directly, but after a few months notice perhaps, can help enormously. India has become a dumping ground for obsolete technology from the US and Europe in the name of development and we must question that too.