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## Desilting of lakes could have saved Bengaluru from flooding, say experts

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BENGALURU: Thirty-five of Bengaluru's 85 lakes overflowed during recent heavy rain, compounding citizens' woes. While waterbodies filling up is always good news, experts say Bengaluru's lakes could hold more water and save the city from flooding, that is if they are desilted and maintained properly.

According to a study by a team led by professor TV Ramachandra from Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bellandur Lake, the city's largest, could hold 18.67 million cubic metres (0.66tmc ft) of water till a few decades ago. With 6.56 million cubic metres of silt on its bed, the lake's storage capacity is now only (5.5 million cubic metres or 0.19tmc ft) — less than one third of what it was earlier. The lake,

meanwhile, has been reduced to a sewage pool spewing froth and fire.

Bellandur is just one example of a waterbody gone foul. According to IISc experts, lakes in the Bengaluru region have a capacity to store at least 5tmc ft of rainwater, but accumulation of silt has reduced it to 1.2tmc ft.

With 209 lakes, Bengaluru was once also known as City of Lakes. However, various studies have recorded that lake catchments have been turned into dumpyards for either municipal solid waste or building debris. "This is apart from sewage inflow that adds to silt and slush in waterbodies. The surroundings of these lakes have illegal buildings and most of the time slum dwellers occupy adjoining areas," Prof Ramachandra pointed out.

Another IISc study titled, Decaying lakes of Bengaluru and today's irrational decision makers, points out that encroachment of natural drains, alteration of topography involving construction of high-rises, removal of vegetative cover, and reclamation of wetlands are the prime reasons for frequent flooding in Bengaluru even during normal rain. Scientists with IISc say just desilting of lakes can go a long way in tackling flooding during monsoon.

As urban expert ASK Pani puts it, desilting of lakes and rejuvenating wetlands associated with them are simpler and cost-effective solutions to avoid flooding. "However, our leaders are more interested in big-ticket projects. Not even 20% to 30% of lakes in the city are properly desilted," he added.

We are rejuvenating lakes: BBMP

A senior BBMP official said they are in the process of rejuvenating lakes. "Even during this season, we are working on lakes like Madiwala and the problem of flooding around it was addressed this time. Similarly, in association with agencies like Karnataka Lake Conservation and Development Authority and Bangalore Development Authority, we have desilted some waterbodies around areas like HSR Layout, Whitefield, Koramangala and BTM Layout. This too has shown good results. Mestripalya Lake and Halanayakanahalli Lake near Kaikondrahalli are other examples where work has been done," he added.

The ones which overflowed this season

Dorekere Lake, Kaggalipura Lake, Uttarahalli Lake, Kudlu Doddakere Lake, Rachenahalli Lake, Nagawara Lake, Bellandur Lake,

Begur Lake, Yelahanka Lake, Kengeri Lake, Yentaganahalli Lake, Binnamangala Lake, Dasanapura Lake, Chikkabidarakallu Lake, Madiwala Lake, Somasundarapalya Lake, Koudenahalli Lake and Jakkur Lake.