

are here: [Home](#) » [City](#) » Missing: CCTV footage of Bellandur Lake 2 weeks after blaze

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A fortnight after a massive fire engulfed the dying Bellandur Lake, the authorities are still looking for footage from the eight CCTV cameras installed to monitor the waterbody.

Experts brought in to examine the damage, however, pointed out that the cameras had malfunctioned, even as the BBMP and Urban Development Department heads desperately look to save faces before the National Green Tribunal.

Mayor R Sampath Raj and BBMP commissioner Manjunath Prasad assert that they had asked for the footage after the fire. But they still do not have crucial images to nail the culprits. The NGT-appointed expert committee had asked for the CCTV footage.

"It would throw some light on the identity of those who started the fire on the grassland around the lake," an UDD official said, seeking anonymity.

Joint commissioner, Mahadevapura zone, Vasanthi Amar B V was not available for comment despite repeated attempts by this newspaper.

In 2017, the BBMP fixed the cameras around the lake to check encroachments and dumping of garbage and construction waste in the lake bed. The civic body had installed them in eight strategic places, besides putting up a board declaring that those flagrantly violating the norms to protect the lake would be fined Rs 5 lakh.

Despite the precautions, a massive fire broke out at the lake on January 19 over a 50-acre area. The fire was so intense that it took nearly 24 hours for over 5,000 personnel from the Indian Army Service Corps and firefighters to douse the flames.

Much to their chagrin, the BBMP and UDD officials found the cameras not in working condition when they tried retrieving the footage.

IISc researchers and the expert committee, who have readied their report on the causes of the lake's poor condition, have also pointed out the camera malfunctioning.

"I've raised my objections in the report on the cameras," said Prof T V Ramachandra from IISc's Centre for Ecological Sciences and a member of the committee. "If the cameras were in working condition, then how was it possible to dump garbage and construction debris around the lake? The lake wouldn't have caught fire if they were working."

Asserting that the effort to monitor the lake with the cameras has gone futile, Prof Ramachandra also

noted that the state government-constituted committee has not seen the footage as well.

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Lax attitude

- * Eight cameras, placed at 'strategic' positions, not in working condition
- * Even 15 days after request from mayor, footage yet to be handed over
- * IISc researchers, expert panel members scathing in their remarks on malfunctioning cameras

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