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## Bengaluru's Bellandur lake catches fire, causing worry among residents

The locals noticed huge clouds of smoke billowing from the Bellandur lake replete with sewage, chemical effluents and construction debris, even as steps were being taken to douse the inferno

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Bellandur lake in Bengaluru is in bad shape despite the National Green Tribunal pulling up the Karnataka government and its various agencies for failing to prevent pollution. Photo: PTI

**Bengaluru:** A huge fire emanated from the highly polluted Bellandur lake, the biggest water body of the city, giving anxious moments to hundreds of residents living nearby.

The locals noticed huge clouds of smoke billowing from the lake replete with sewage, chemical effluents and construction debris.

The fire was in the middle of the wetlands, fire brigade officials said. Soon pictures and videos of the smoke and fire went viral even as various government agencies and Defence personnel doused the blaze, which also raised concerns about apathy of civic agencies towards a recurring problem the lake.

According to Defence officials, a strong contingent of 5,000 army jawans of the ASC centre led by Major General N S Rajpurohit doused the fire in the lake.

Spread over 1,000 acres near the infotech hub, the lake is highly contaminated receiving 60% of the sewage generated in the city.

The lake is in bad shape despite the National Green Tribunal pulling up the government and its various agencies for failing to prevent pollution and not doing enough to restore the lake to its pristine glory.

Bengaluru Mayor R Sampath Raj said the fire seems to be an outcome of the accumulation of chemicals. The water samples will be collected and tested to find the reason behind the fire, he said.

Raj said government agencies and Bangalore Development Authority and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) would seek the assistance of the Indian Institute of Science to find the reason and chalk out steps to prevent any recurrence.

Following the incident, a blame game erupted between the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board and the defence department.

KSPCB chairman Lakshman alleged that the fire started from the land held by the defence department and spread to the lake area.

“Actual cause of the fire is not known. It started from the defence area. We have taken the samples of the water and will send it to lab for ascertaining the reasons behind the fire,” Lakshman said.

The defence department maintained that the fire was in the lake area and not anywhere near the land held by it.

Rajya Sabha member Rajeev Chandrasekhar, whose organisation Namma Bengaluru Foundation, had petitioned the National Green Tribunal to save the lake, flayed the government for its “inability” to protect the lake.

“I think it is evident that the Siddaramaiah government is not serious about protecting the lakes and abiding by the NGT’s directions on maintaining the sanctity of its buffer zone,” he said.

The state government is going to spend Rs 80,000 crore in the next 75 days on various projects but not a single penny will be spent on the improvement of any of the lakes in Bengaluru, Chandrasekhar alleged.

The Bellandur lake had caught fire in May 2015 and August 2016, also. In 2015, the lake had turned into a frothy, foam-filled water body due to the high concentration of pollutants in the water.

Foam from the lake had spilled onto the roads and other areas surrounding the lake. The Varthur lake also had caught fire in May, 2017 when some garbage was set ablaze.

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