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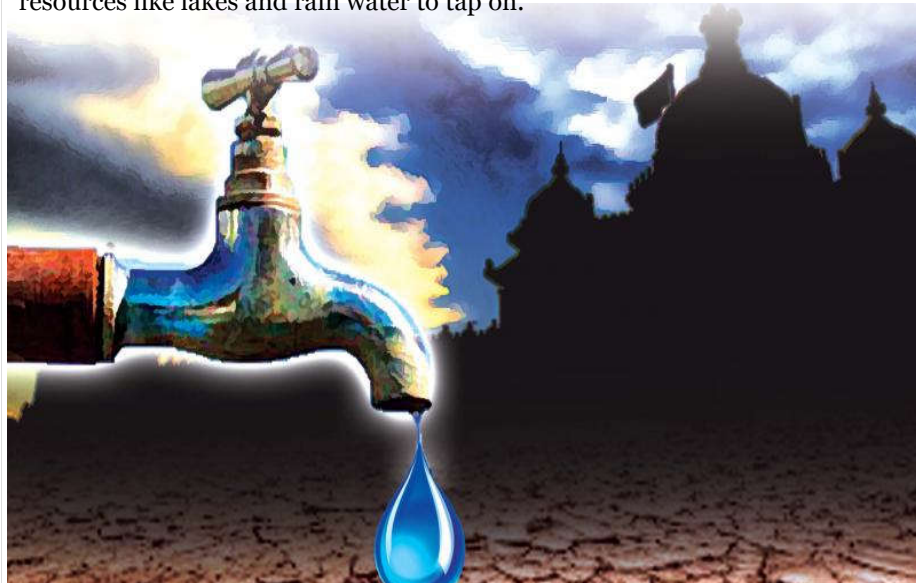
River's end: Crisis looms for Bengaluru?

DECCAN CHRONICLE. | AKNISREE KARTHIK (/byline/aknisree-karthik)

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The city is too dependent on the far away Cauvery when it has local resources like lakes and rain water to tap on.



📷 Minister K.J. George saying the additional 10 TMC allotment to Bengaluru will mitigate a shortage. Why wait for disaster, it's time for a more sustainable approach to Bengaluru's water problems.

A media report that claims Bengaluru is the next Cape Town has created a fresh wave of panic amongst citizens and experts alike. The latter have long since decried our reliance on the Cauvery with rampant lake encroachment, inadequate STPs and minimal rainwater harvesting efforts worsening the problem. Authorities don't seem too worried, with Minister K.J. George saying the additional 10 TMC allotment to Bengaluru will mitigate a shortage. Why wait for disaster, it's time for a more sustainable approach to Bengaluru's water problems, reports Aknisree Karthik

The government is dismissive of it and water experts have mixed opinions on it. But the BBC's warning that Bengaluru could face a fate similar to Cape Town's, which is on the verge of turning bone dry, has kicked up a debate on whether the city is doing enough to conserve its water and create more supply sources for its people.

Water expert and founder member of People's Campaign for Right to Water, Kshitij Urs, who is hardly surprised by the BBC report, believes the city is too dependent on the far away Cauvery when it

has local resources like lakes and rain water to tap on.

"We have repeatedly told the water board and the state government that they need to look for water sources within the city instead of fetching its supply over almost 100 kms, at a cost of crores from the river Cauvery. In my view, we should always rely on local sources instead of depending on river water far away. Were all our ancestors dependent on Cauvery? Weren't they able to manage with wells and lakes? Then why are we so much dependent on the river?" he asks pertinently.

The activist argues the city may not need Cauvery water at all if it does more to tap rain water and the water board gets more serious about promoting rain water harvesting among its people.

"The BBC report should be a wake-up call. People need to wake up too and demand the government do the right thing to pull the city out of its water crisis," Mr Urs underlines.

Coming out strongly against measures like diverting water to the city from the Netravathi river at huge cost to the environment and expense, he claims such projects only help the corrupt make money. "Unfortunately, such projects get attention and are taken up immediately when we could solve the city's water scarcity problem with simple measures like rain water harvesting, rejuvenating its lakes and recycling waste water," he says.

But it's not just Bengaluru, major cities like Hyderabad, Chennai, and Ahmedabad too are looking at a similar dry future, he maintains. "It's just that more research is being done in Bengaluru on water scarcity. But Ahmedabad has gone so dry that the dead storage in Narmada is being used up," he observes.

Don't panic, harvest rain water instead, says expert

Bengaluru Development Minister, K J George is not particularly concerned by the BBC report warning about impending water scarcity in the city. "The news is based on a survey done in 2014 of the world's 500 largest cities. We have done enough work since then to mitigate any water crisis," he says confidently.

Mr George explains Bengaluru has been allotted 10 TMC additional water from the Cauvery, taking its supply from 1400 million litres per day (MLD) to 2715 MLD by 2023. Besides, the city receives another 193 MLD by 2021 from the Yettinahole project, taking its supply to 2368 MLD in all by 2023, he points out.

"Moreover, the government is investing heavily in treating sewage water and by 2020 the BWSSB will be able to treat all the sewage generated in the city," he claims, spelling out all reasons why Bengaluru does not have to be concerned by predictions of doom.

Water expert, Vishwanath too does not believe there is any cause for panic. "Bengaluru has enough water from the river Cauvery for its people. The recent BBC report is creating unnecessary panic. This will only give politicians and babus an excuse to opt for large projects to bring water to the city," he warns.

While he says the water board is promoting rain water harvesting, slapping fines on defaulters and recycling waste water, Mr Vishwanath suggests the BWSSB should do RWH on a big scale along roads, playgrounds, in open spaces and so on.

"Bengaluru could become self-sufficient if it taps just half the rain water it receives every year and starts promoting recycled waste water," he adds.

Calling on people to wake up and protest the pollution of the city's water bodies the way they did against the steel flyover that was eventually scrapped, Mr Vishwanath says its time serious measures are taken to rejuvenate Bengaluru's lakes as they can come in very handy as water sources.

In his view, it's also important to make Bengalureans "water literate" so they learn to use water judiciously and opt for for rain water harvesting voluntarily.

Guest column: River diversion projects are an ecological disaster, says Dr T V Ramachandra lead scientist, IISc

"I had long ago warned that Bengaluru would become unlivable and turn into a dead city by 2020. But not many took me seriously. However, once the BBC picks it up, it becomes a hot topic of discussion.

Nothing significant happened after we published the report. Neither the babus nor the politicians woke up and the lakes are still filled with water not fit for drinking . It is the colonial mindset of people that is preventing them from taking any immediate measures to correct the situation. All the large scale river diversion projects like Yettinahole and Netravati will have serious environmental consequences , forcing us all to pay a heavy price for them.

The city just needs around 18 to 20 TMC of water every year, which

can be met if we revive lakes and treat waste water. Just by reviving lakes and rain water harvesting we could get 15 TMC and by treating 16 TMC of sewage generated by the city, another 14 TMC, making it both self-sufficient and surplus by 11 TMC.

Instead of taking such measures, politicians are aiming to loot the state by proposing river diversion projects. The latest report has given politicians much ammunition to defend the big projects. But let me warn you that the city will become dead if its people do not wake up and put pressure on the government to do what is right for it.

We will ensure the city does not face any water crisis with the help of the enlightened people of Bengaluru."

— **K J George, Bengaluru development minister**

The recent BBC report is creating unnecessary panic among people and will only give politicians and babus an excuse to opt for large projects to bring water to the city.'

— **Vishwanath s water expert**

- A recent BBC report has created panic, warning Bengaluru is on its way to becoming another Cape Town where water scarcity is concerned
- It notes that water in 85 per cent of its lakes is only good enough for irrigation and industrial use, but not for drinking and bathing.
- Water experts suggest the BWSSB needs to wake up and do the needful to avert a severe water crisis.
- They want rejuvenation of lakes, rain water harvesting, treating and reusing of waste water.
- Experts also want Bengalureans to become water literate to help them use water judiciously.
- Bengaluru development minister, K J George dismisses the BBC report, says enough steps have been taken to avert a water crisis.

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