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*Hearing the suo motu matter arising out of the fire in the Bellandur lake, the tribunal asked the government to address the root cause of problems, leading to pollution of the city lakes. DH File Photo*

The National Green Tribunal on Monday told the Karnataka government to start taking immediate action for rejuvenation of Bellandur, Agara and Varthul lakes in Bengaluru.

A bench presided over by Justice U D Salvi ordered the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) to issue directions to all 99 apartment complexes, which are discharging sewage in the Bellandur and Varthul lakes, to establish modular sewage treatment plants within the available space without posing threat to the structural safety. The state authorities have given time till December 2018 for establishing such plants.

Hearing the suo motu matter arising out of the fire in the Bellandur lake, the tribunal asked the government to address the root cause of problems, leading to pollution of the city lakes.

"Environment justice requires immediate steps for stopping the continuing pollution of Bellandur lake. This will also stop the growth of microfiles which nurture on these sewages. We therefore direct the state pollution control board to initiate action for issuing directions to the 99 apartment projects to install modular STPs which can be placed in the available free space particularly the basement and does pose any threat to the structure of the said project," the bench said.

The tribunal also directed for setting up an experts panel from Indian Institute of Science for making on the spot assessment of the lake, including undertaking a study of lifecycle of Macrophytes and its biological removal, eradication, desedimentation and taking follow up actions on the basis of their recommendations.

The NGT also directed the state authorities to remove the macrophytes, including dry floating grass, which emerged as one of the reasons for recent fire in the lake. The tribunal would again take up the matter for consideration on February 28.

After hearing Additional Advocate General Aditya Sondhi and Additional Chief Secretary, Urban Development Mahendra Jain, the tribunal said we direct the state authorities to get an action plan ready and start working on rejuvenation of the three lakes within three weeks.

The bench also quizzed the state official as well as the counsel as what actions they took to prevent encroachment surrounding the lakes and their catchment areas. Jain submitted that as much as 19,000 metric tonnes of silt has been removed from Bellandur lake.

Advocate P Ram Prasad, appearing for original applicant Rajya Sabha MP Kupendra Reddy, contended that the tribunal's directions issued earlier have not been complied with as catchment areas and buffer zones remained encroached. He sought direction to ensure proper taking care of all water bodies in the city. Sondhi sought four months time to act on action prepared by the state authorities.

The tribunal, after directing for removal of checking discharge of all industrial effluents in the bodies, rued, "days were passing by in debate and discussion without any action on the ground".