

NGT tears into K'taka govt, forms own panel to inspect Bellandur, other lakes

Hoardings, flex banners and even photos of leaders on civic websites will be removed in the next 24 hours.

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The National Green Tribunal on Wednesday came down heavily on the Karnataka government for its inaction with regard to the rejuvenation of three Bengaluru lakes – Bellandur, Agara and Varthur.

The NGT bench headed by Acting Chairperson Justice Jawad Rahim appointed a seven-member committee to inspect the three lakes on April 14 and April 15, after concluding that the state government's report was erroneous and 'misleading'.

The commission will be headed by senior advocate Raj Panjwani. Other members will include a professor from the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, a senior scientist from the Central

Pollution Control Board, the commissioner of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike and the secretary of Bangalore Development Authority.

The commission will inspect to what extent the lakes are covered by macrophytes and hydrophytes, and the rate of their removal, the extent of sewage and municipal solid waste dumped and the records of all fire incidents in the lake till April 10, 2018.

The commission has also been asked to note the change in the size of the lakes, the extent of silt and other such deposits and the number of treatment plants around the lake.

Finally, it is also supposed to check if the state has complied with the previous orders of the Tribunal. The commission is expected to submit a detailed report after the scrutiny.

The Police Commissioner of Bengaluru, T Suneel Kumar, has been asked to arrange for security as the Namma Bengaluru Foundation and other applicants assist the commission.

The matter will be taken up again on May 11, 2018, when the report will be reviewed.

Although for Bellandur residents the sight of the lake catching fire is almost routine now, it caught the attention of the national and international media following the February 16, 2017, episode.

The Karnataka Lake Development and Conservation Authority (KLCDA) had come under heavy criticism from the NGT following this incident.

The latest fire on January 19, 2018 that raged on for almost 30 hours was the last major episode that embarrassed the government.

The Bellandur Lake, the largest in the city, receives about 40% of the city's sewage. The continuous dumping of sewage, chemical effluents and construction debris into it are responsible for the deplorable state of the lake.

This directive from the NGT comes when the state government is under fire from activists on going back on a progressive law. The state government in January had repealed the progressive Karnataka Lake Conservation and Development authority (KLCDA) Act. With the amendments stating that lakes will now be managed by the Minor Irrigation Department, which environmentalists feel are ill-equipped to handle the city's lakes.

The NGT had taken up the issue, taking suo motu cognisance of the matter, after the Bellandur Lake caught fire for the second time in February 2017.