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# Lakes of Bengaluru: Slow rejuvenation work at Varthur raises concern

● In 2016, the state government appointed an expert committee that drafted a set of recommendations to address the issues at Varthur and Bellandur lakes. However, the government never implemented the recommendations.

Written by [Aksheev Thakur](#) | Bengaluru |

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Over the past decade, rapid urbanisation in the area has led to a deterioration in the water quality of the Varthur Lake. (Express photo by Jithendra M)

Spread over 800 acres, the Varthur Lake is one of the largest waterbodies in the Bengaluru South taluk. Notably, the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in a research paper had stated that the Bellandur Lake is connected to the surrounding wetlands that drain into the Varthur Lake and, finally, into the Dakshina Pinakini river. The total farm land irrigated by the Varthur Lake amounts to 625 hectares.

Over the past decade, rapid urbanisation in the area has led to a deterioration in the water quality of the Varthur Lake.

In 2016, the state government appointed an expert committee that drafted a set of recommendations to address the issues at Varthur and Bellandur lakes. However, the government never implemented the recommendations.



Varthur Lake (Express photo by Jithendra M)

Finally, the citizens took up the cudgels to protect the lake and in June 2018, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) constituted a monitoring committee under former Lokayukta Justice Santosh Hegde to oversee the implementation of directions related to the rejuvenation of the Varthur Lake.

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However, the NGT dissolved the monitoring committee in March 2021 and handed over the baton to oversee the rejuvenation of the lake carried out jointly by government agencies, including the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA),



Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), revenue department and the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), to Chief Secretary P Ravi Kumar.

However, experts have pointed out that the restoration work slowed down considerably after the monitoring committee was dissolved.



Heap of garbage near Varthur Lake (Express photo by Jithendra M)

Speaking to [indianexpress.com](https://indianexpress.com), Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Prof TV Ramachandra, who is a former member of the monitoring committee, said: “The NGT should not have dissolved the committee midway. The government agencies working on the lake were afraid of the committee and that fear is now gone. Consequently, the rejuvenation work has slowed down to a large extent, sewage is still entering the lake and the water quality is bad. Moreover, the fencing around the lake has also got broken at certain places. The NGT should ensure the completion of the rejuvenation work of both Bellandur and Varthur lakes. I am hopeful that things will improve in the future. The participation of the local people is crucial.”

Ramachandra is scheduled to meet Additional Chief Secretary (urban development department) Rakesh Singh on January 6, to discuss the gaps in the rejuvenation of the lakes.

Notably, the desilting of the Varthur Lake being carried out by the BDA is yet to be completed one year down the line.

The government officials, however, claimed that desilting of the lake would be over by May this year.

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The minor irrigation department's alleged reluctance to remove the pipeline and the road that were constructed through the lake in 2017 was another issue affecting the rejuvenation work.

The pipeline was meant to pump treated water to tanks in Kolar. The now-defunct Karnataka Lake Conservation and Development Authority's (KLCDA) permission was not sought before the construction of the road and the laying of the pipeline. Although the NGT has ordered the department to remove the pipeline, officials said requesting anonymity that no plan to remove the pipeline has been made yet.



Varthur Lake (Express photo by Jithendra M)

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In 2020, the BDA had proposed to construct a biodiversity park on 16.6 acres around the Varthur Lake. However, the idea was shot down by the NGT after it was

pointed out that the plan would impact the water-holding capacity of the lake.

Explaining the reason behind sewage flowing into the lake, a senior BWSSB official said, “The BBMP has included 110 villages in its ambit recently. We assume that 25-30 MLD of untreated sewage from these villages mixes with the treated water and enters the lake. The sewer lines of these 110 villages will be connected to the sewage treatment plant (STP) by 2024. Presently, our STPs have a capacity to treat 583 MLD of sewage, of which 563 MLD of sewage is being treated.”

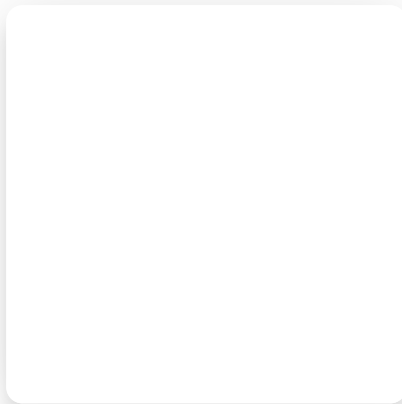
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He said that there are plans to upgrade the STPs across Bengaluru and the lakes could be free from sewage by 2026.

The Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) has in its report stated that the water quality index of the Varthur Lake is unsatisfactory.



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Jagadish Reddy, a member of citizen group Varthur Rising, said, “The street lights and CCTV cameras that have been installed around the lake are not working. The marshals, who are appointed for the protection of the lake, don’t get water for domestic purposes. The quality parameters of the lake are still of major concern.”

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He added that diversion of the drains carrying sewage from Bellandur and Varthur lakes has added to the pollution of Kelavarapalli dam near Hosur. “The water of the dam has turned foamy. The diversion was made to carry out desilting work but the major issue is lack of treatment of sewage. So, the BWSSB should ensure that only treated water flows through the diversion channels,” Reddy added.

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