

BENGALURU

In Bengaluru, 437 acres of 169 lakes encroached

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As parts of the city continue to live in fear of a heavy downpour that might leave their localities and homes inundated, a survey of lakes by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has revealed that around 437 acres out of around 5,207 acres under 169 lakes in the city have been encroached. So far, the BBMP has managed to recover 45 acres.

According to the survey, parts of most of the lakes in the city have been encroached over a period of time, including by government agencies and departments.

“In some cases, a few guntas have been encroached and in some others, acres of land have been encroached upon. However, not all encroached portions have been used for buildings,” a senior BBMP official said.

Magisterial powers to three officers

Another official said that three tahsildar level officers have been appointed as ‘Special Executive Magistrates’ to execute the encroachment drive.

“They have not yet reported for duty due to COVID-19 related administrative reasons. Once the number of cases in the city come down, they will focus on taking possession of the encroached parts,” the official said.

Commenting on government agencies encroaching on lakes, a BBMP official said that a decision on such issues should be taken at the government level. “Layouts have already been built by government agencies in lake areas. The government needs to take a decision on it,” the official said.

In the third week of June, the BBMP had issued a public notice that it would crack down on encroachments and take possession of lake beds and surrounding areas that fall under its jurisdiction.

The BBMP has uploaded certified survey sketches and encroachment details of over 80 lakes under six zones in the city on its website as per directions of the High Court.

SWD encroachment

V. Ramprasad, convener and co-founder of Friends of Lake, said that lake encroachment survey and clearance drive should be extended to rajakaluves (stormwater drains or SWDs) that are linked to lakes. "I hope that the BBMP takes similar action against encroachers of SWDs so that the lakes greatly benefit," he said.

Mr. Ramprasad also said that the officers during whose tenure the encroachments took place should be “criminally prosecuted”.

“Until and unless and criminal prosecution against the erring officials is not done, the battle is only half won. This will also send a strong message and act as an alarm bell to officials working now and those who will come in the future,” he said.

‘Mismanagement of landscape’

Flooding of various areas during rains is a result of mismanagement of landscape and encroachment of wetlands and valleys, lake conservationists say.

V. Ramprasad said, “Encroachment and infrastructure development in huge portions of land that was once valley area is one of them main reasons for flooding. Take the example of places in and around Manyata Tech Park, which was inundated recently. It is a part of Hebbal valley, and a huge wetland was present even in the early 2000s,” he said, adding that it was the same case in other two important valleys in the city – Vrishabhavathy valley and K.C. Valley.

TV. Ramachandra from the Indian Institute of Science, said that encroachment of stormwater drains (SWDs) and reduction of their width also contributed to the problem. “In the name of remoulding of SWDs, they have reduced the width and have concretised the bottom of the SWD, which should not have been done,” he said, adding that the links that interconnected lakes were also cut.

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