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Kochi: NGT suspects high river water pollution during this monsoon

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KOCHI: Rivers, including Kadambayar and Chitrapuzha, are often contaminated during monsoon season with runoff from the banks. Suspecting that this time it could be even higher as a fallout of Brahmapuram fire, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has raised concern while hearing the Brahmapuram fire case. The green court has asked the state government to file a comprehensive report next week regarding handling of waste at the yard till now and the future plans. The court has asked the local self-government department (LSGD) to coordinate with the water resources department and health department to monitor river water pollution. The matter will be heard on August 1.

"Based on instructions from the state-appointed technical committee comprising engineers from LSGD, pollution control board (PCB) and irrigation departments, we have covered the burnt heaps with tarpaulin sheets at Brahmapuram so that it doesn't flow into nearby waterbodies," said Kochi mayor Anilkumar.

However, officials said that this is not going to stop contamination as the land is marshy and much of it has already seeped into the waters. PCB officials said that the corporation has taken some measures and it will need to be evaluated.

According to PCB's river rejuvenation report submitted in March, contamination levels of both Chitrapuzha and Kadambayar rivers at various points indicate high levels of heavy metal contamination and coliform bacteria.

"Everybody knows that contamination is high. What we need to know is what are the contaminants and also the presence of its impact on soil and marine life. What should have been done is the sampling of waters till Tripunithura immediately and the reports should have been made public so that people will take precautions," said environmentalist C M Joy.

According to the PCB report, local bodies, including Vadavucode-Puthencruz and Tripunithura, have set up inspection squads and surveillance to monitor river pollution by individuals and organizations. A common effluent treatment plant has become operational at Chitrapuzha and the compliance is being monitored. Thrikkakara municipality has started to identify and fine major polluters, including apartments, hospitals, service stations, markets and industries in the upstream of the river.

However, green activists say that this is all an eyewash.

"At Pathalam, nothing is being done for the River Periyar action plan. When we collected samples of sludge and sediments at Kuzhikkandam Thodu and showed the reports to PCB, they said that their reports showed zero values for DDT, BHC, etc. whereas we had found presence of contaminants. We have asked them to collect the samples for us and we have taken it for testing. The reports will be out soon," said Periyar Maleenikarana Virudha Samithi research coordinator Purushan Eloor.

