



Builder must be thrown into the sea: IISc don

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Dr TV Ramachandra

The residents' fight against encroachment of wetlands has received a shot in the arm with the scientists at Indian Institute of Science (IISc) agreeing to carry out an impact study titled "Conservation of Bellandur Wetlands: Obligation of Decision Makers to Ensure Intergenerational Equity."

Reacting to NGT's order, lead scientist at IISc's Centre for Ecological Sciences' Energy and Wetlands Research Group Dr TV Ramachandra told Bangalore Mirror: "I am happy about what has come out now. Penalising the builders and

slapping penalties is not enough; the builders and developers must be thrown out of the wetland if at all anybody is serious about conserving lakes of Bengaluru. By going ahead with the project, the builders and developers have caused severe damage to the fragile wetland. These wetlands act as kidneys of the ecosystem as they filter surface water. If you go by what they have done to the wetlands in a city like Bengaluru, they must be thrown into the Arabian Sea."

In fact, Ramachandra and his team comprising Bharath H Aithal, S Vinay and Aaamir Amin Lone had to brave severe threats and face stiff opposition while readying the report. Ramachandra said: "It was Vijayan Menon of Koramangala Residents Welfare Association who approached our lab first to highlight the problem. Menon shot a mail to me seeking my intervention and to help them scientifically unearth the irregularities at this particular wetland. By then they had gone to all the organisations and nobody could help them with concrete evidences in their battle to safeguard this fragile chunk of ecosystem. As me and my young team have been working on conservation of Bengaluru wetlands, we took up the project and making use of satellite imageries and GPS technology we established irregularities and the damage done to the wetland."

While carrying out the scientific study on the wetland encroachment, his team was harassed by builders and developers through various people. "Though none of them touched us, they used every opportunity to harass us. Hundreds of RTIs were filed against us to expose who is behind our study, who is funding our projects etc. In fact they refused us to enter the project site. Yet my team members comprising largely young researchers managed to sneak into the area through neighbouring properties and managed to complete the study successfully. Finally a senior bureaucrat had countered my report saying that all our findings are untrue and nothing will happen to the wetland. Further I wrote to the Union government with all relevant scientific documents and the government was convinced. In a way bureaucrats are also responsible along with the builders in systematically killing the wetlands of Bengaluru."

Ramachandra revealed that it was satellite images that helped them scientifically establish the violations perpetrated by the builders and developers. "Government or bureaucracy may lie. But the pictures do not lie and they are worth a thousand words. I will be happier if the court throws these builders out of the property and restores the wetland to its original condition. It would certainly help rejuvenate the ground water resources around the area."

Ramachandra said the court must also punish bureaucrats - particularly at KIADB - who misguided the government. "The officials at KIADB did not properly advise the government about the status and condition of the wetland on which the builders were coming up with the project. As per the Government of India Wetland Regulatory Rules, these wetlands are fragile ecosystems and should be not touched for any purpose. Yet, the officials have gone against all these parameters and advised the government incorrectly."

The IISc report makes it very clear the disaster awaiting the Bellandur lake due to 'development.' The Environmental Information System (ENVIS) Report No 55 of May 2013 should have been an eye-opener. The report stated



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* Location of SEZ in valley zone is contrary to sustainable development as they are 'no development zones.' * SEZ is in flood prone zone of the lake and wetland * SEZ is in violation of HC order * Additional 10,000 to 14,000 vehicles will create air pollution and bottleneck in area * Project requires 4.58 Million liters of water per day which is not sustainable * BWSSB has said it cannot provide such quantities of water

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