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Bellandur's white devil: The foam that just won't stop

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A frothing Bellandur Lake (Photo: Satish B.)

Bengaluru: Bellandur and Varthur Lakes have been spewing toxic froth for a long time. Residents have seen many inspections by ministers and bureaucrats, and innumerable promises to restore the lake and clear the froth. The situation has gone from bad to worse and demands have been pouring from all sections to clean the lake, but in vain. Residents allege that the toxic levels are so high that a permanent layer of black covers the interior of their homes and silver articles are losing sheen. The health hazards posed by this massive outbreak of froth are numerous to be mentioned.

The BBMP and BWSSB efforts to curb frothing by spraying chemicals have not helped a bit. In fact, now residents are planning a massive protest to demand the cleaning of the lake. DC speaks to prominent citizens of the area on the problems being encountered.

Monil JR, a resident near Bellandur Lake points out, "There are times when we find it difficult to breathe. We often get headaches. In fact, we do not open the windows of our house. When we bought the land 20 years ago, this place was a paradise with greenery around. But in the last 5-6 years, things have turned around as sewage from six places is being let into this lake without

being treated.” He further added, “In fact, commuting has become a major problem for residents of Bellandur due to the froth. We can neither go out nor come in. Every now and then, the froth blocks the way creating inconvenience for the commuters to drive.”

Untreated sewage has been flowing into the lake primarily from HAL, Domlur, Koramangala and Agara. Mohammad Usman, a shopkeeper says, “The froth comes on to the road especially during rains. As far as the smell is concerned, we have become immune to now.” Kabir Das, a resident says, “Nothing has changed in last five years. We have been infected with skin, asthma and wheezing problems. But does any care?”

Monil adds, “Recently I got in touch with MLA Aravind Limbavali through WhatsApp and he replied they will take the matter up. He said that BDA is preparing a DPR. He told me to take an appointment and come see him if I need more details. During election, he did not take any appointment to come and ask for votes, then why do we have to take one to know about the measures taken to solve such a problem?”

Currently, the authorities have installed about 4-6 machines near the lake to spray a chemical which the civic agency claim helps to subside the smell and the froth, however, it has been of little help, claim residents.

When DC quizzed MP P C Mohan about the inordinate delay in taking actions, he said, “We are looking at permanent solutions. We will have a talk with BWSSB. First sewage entering the lakes has to be stopped and apartments that are letting out sewage to the lake have to be identified.”

No dearth of solutions, says expert

There is no dearth of solutions to solve frothing of lakes across the city. IISc scientist T.V. Ramachandra has offered to find an effective solution for the problem. The government has only made tall promises on setting up treatment plants, removing encroachments and plugging entry of sewerage into the lake to curb rampant frothing of the lake. Instead the problem has multiplied with the froth blocking the visibility of road.

R.K. Misra, urban expert says, “Let it be a bypass like Agara Lake. Do not let the sewage enter the lake, unless that is done, we cannot save the lake. Only BWSSB can handle this. In fact they can use the lake water for other purposes as well. It is a disaster. Today rajakaluve has become sewage kaluve.

T.V. Ramachandra listed out many solutions to attend to the issue. To start with, he pointed out that the lake needs de-silting and technological advancements allow wet dredging in a lake. Removal of accumulated silt will help in the storage of rain water and also recharging of ground water resources in the vicinity. This is essential as the groundwater table in the vicinity is as high as 1,000-1,500 feet.

Then wastewater can be treated through constructed wetlands and algal ponds (similar to Jakkur lake). He also suggests constructing wetlands with shallow algal ponds to help in the removal of nutrients and allow only treated wastewater (sewage and effluents) to the lake.

Re-establishing interconnectivity among lakes is another important step that needs to be taken. Removal of all encroachments (of storm water drains and Raja Kaluves) is also essential. Encroachments of storm water drains has led to stagnation of water and flooding in Yamalur region. This should be followed by ban on alterations in the topography. Due to large scale land

use changes and filling of low lying area, some of the new localities are now vulnerable to floods.

Other suggestions include maintaining 30 m buffer around the lake (with regulated activities) is another key step including constituting lake conservation committee consisting of all stakeholders for regular monitoring and management.

Lastly, the, threshold needs to set on high rise building in the region as the agencies need to protect valley zones considering ecological function and these regions are 'NO DEVELOPMENT ZONES' as per CDP 2005, 2015.

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