

NGT commission seeks probe into encroachment of Varthur lake

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While the department claimed that the road is 315 metres long, the commission said a visual inspection revealed that it stretched for nearly 1 kilometre along the northern bank of Varthur lake. | Photo Credit: [handout E mail](#)

Says construction of a road by Minor Irrigation Department for laying a pipeline was a ‘horrific sight’

While Kolar may revel in the pride of finally getting an irrigation project in the form of treated water from Bengaluru, a National Green Tribunal (NGT) appointed commission has found ‘environmental irregularities’ and encroachment of Varthur lake during the project.

The commission was mandated by the NGT to look into issues of rejuvenation of Bellandur and Varthur lakes.

In a strongly-worded report, the commission said the construction of a road by the Minor Irrigation Department for laying a pipeline was a ‘horrible sight’.

The three-member committee of senior advocate and Chairperson Raj Panjwani, and advocates Rahul Chaudhary and Sumeer Sodhi were appraised of the road construction on the periphery and within the lake during their visit to Varthur lake in mid-April.

The ₹13.4 crore project was executed by the Minor Irrigation Department. It involved widening an ‘existing’ 15 metre wide road, and dumping of more than 16,228 tonnes of soil and construction debris into the lake.

The road was to be removed after laying of the pipeline was completed. While the department claimed that the road is 315 metres long, the commission said a visual inspection revealed that it stretched for nearly 1 kilometre along the northern bank of Varthur lake.

While work was to commence after obtaining ‘environment clearance and other statutory clearances’, the commission noted that no detailed project report was prepared.

The commission asked Indian Institute of Science (IISc.) researchers to verify the claims of the department. While the department claimed there was an existing road as on November 2017, satellite imagery analysed by the researchers in March and October 2016 did not show any road along the bank. The area had water covered in a shroud of macrophyte. It was only in March 2017 that a mud road was built by a ‘local builder’ along with local BBMP councillors.

“A local builder (with muscle and money power) created a mud road by pushing the fence of the lake. Integrity of the lake is deliberately compromised to help the builder,” states a letter by researcher T.V. Ramachandra to the commission.

The researchers said the act of building a road through the lake constituted a violation of the Karnataka Lake Conservation And Development Authority Act, 2014 and Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017.

‘Road has compromised the integrity and ecology of Varthur lake’

The commission has called for an independent inquiry into the matter, and have said there was not an ‘iota of doubt’ that construction of the road had compromised the integrity and ecology of Varthur lake. “An appropriate independent enquiry needs to be instituted to unravel the guilt of the officers involved in this catastrophe,” said the commission, adding that the allegations of the road being built to suit the land developer was ‘prima facie justified’.

Jagadish Reddy from Varthur Rising, who complained to the commission, said while the project was being carried out with good intentions, the execution has seen over 2.7 km of the lake periphery being violated. “The contractor violated all the norms specified for the project. Even after we and the Karnataka Lake Conservation and Development Authority pointed out the irregularities, the Minor Irrigation Department continued with the construction. Even BDA, who is the custodian of the lake, is complicit, as they did little stop the violations,” he said.

Minor Irrigation Department officials justified the road saying it had to be created and widened to allow for laying of 2-metre diameter pipes. “The cranes and heavy machinery needed for the project require large spaces to manoeuvre. We will remove the soil as the project is completed, and this is what we’ve informed the commission too,” an official said.

While the project was completed more than a month ago, work on removal of the soil is yet to commence. According to the IISc. researchers, over 1,800 truck trips will be needed to remove the dumped mud.