

Planet in Milky Way Galaxy to be named after 16-year-old Indian girl

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Sahithi Pingali is a 16-year-old Bengaluru schoolgirl, whose concern and work for the city's polluted lakes have earned her this honour.

The planet will be named after her through the Ceres Connection programme run by the MIT Lincoln Laboratory and Society for Science and the Public. Fewer than 15,000 people in the world share the honour of having a minor planet named after them.

Sahithi Pingali has won three special awards in addition to a second prize in the Earth and Environmental Sciences category at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair ISEF at Los Angeles. The awards were given for an app-based system, which she developed to monitor water bodies.

She claims that over 90 per cent of our lakes are sewage-fed and this issue is made worse by the fact that there isn't enough monitoring.

Currently, Sahithi is pursuing an internship at the University of Michigan's Environmental and Water Resources Engineering Centre.

More about her app

Sahithi's app helps people to easily gather water testing data and understand it. The mobile-based kit works with electronic sensors and test strips to let the user collect physical and chemical parameters of a water sample. A colour recognition and mapping software built into the app captures the colour of the test strip to indicate the extent of contamination in water. This crowd sourced data is then uploaded onto a cloud platform. She calls it a water health map.

Her father Gopal Pingali, vice president and distinguished engineer at IBM Global Technology Services Labs, said she found mentors on her own, including IISc ecologist TV Ramachandra and Shiv Shankar from Whitefield Rising. "No one in the family has achieved something like this to make the country proud. She's put our name in the sky," the father said, to the *Economic Times*.