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THE TIMES OF INDIA

IISc nails Karnataka government's lie on the cause of Bellandur blaze

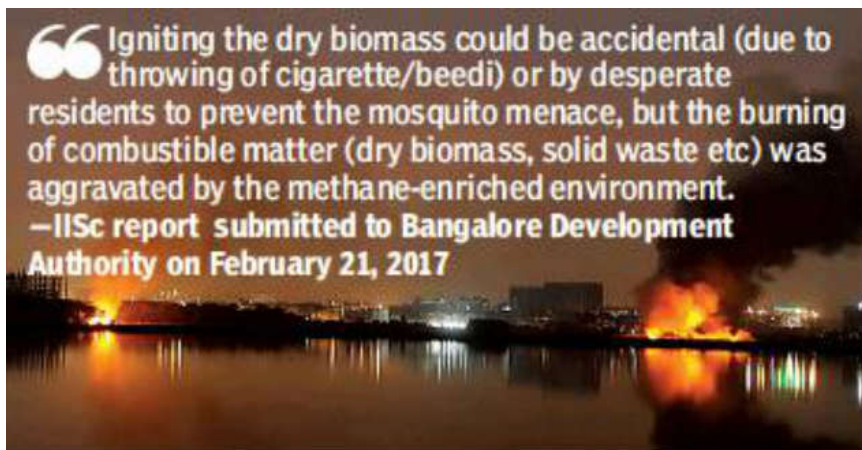
TNN | Feb 3, 2018, 05:36 AM IST



BENGALURU: When the National Green Tribunal (NGT) recently asked the Karnataka government about the cause of frequent fires at Bellandur Lake, including the 30-hour-long blaze a couple of weeks ago, government agencies submitted that it was due to burning grass - probably a fire set off by miscreants.

However, Indian Institute of Science (IISc), the country's premier science institution has, in one of its reports filed in the wake of a similar fire in February 2017, said that the increasing level of methane in the highly polluted lake is the cause of the fire.

A senior scientist with IISc said their preliminary investigation to find out the cause of the January 19 fire in the waterbody also indicated that the presence of methane had fanned the blaze and sustained it for more than 30 hours.



TOI accessed the IISc report about a 2017 fire prepared by Dr TV Ramachandra, coordinator, Energy & Wetlands Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences.

"Igniting the dry biomass could be accidental (due to throwing of cigarette/beedi) or by desperate residents to prevent the mosquito menace, but the burning of combustible matter (dry biomass, solid waste etc) was aggravated by the methane-enriched environment," read the report which, in fact, was submitted to Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) on February 21, 2017.

The IISc report further said that methane generation in the lake was confirmed by sample chemical analysis and field investigation. "Water hyacinth provides suitable breeding places for mosquitoes and other disease-carrying insects and makes the region anaerobic, leading to the generation of methane," the report added.

On the contrary, a consolidated action plan on Bellandur Lake revival submitted by the Karnataka government to the NGT, post the January 19 blaze this year, claims that methane presence in the waterbody is minimal.

'Study confirmed presence of methane'

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The report said methane generation in the lake was confirmed by sample chemical analysis and field investigation. "Water hyacinth provides suitable breeding places for mosquitoes and other insects and makes the region anaerobic, leading to the generation of methane," the report added.

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The government report before the NGT said fire incidents at the lake are taking place mainly due to organic waste and dry grass catching fire. "The fire is very likely to have been ignited due to human intervention, either intentional or otherwise, on the floating dry grass accumulated with sludge," the report added.

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The Karnataka government's blatant attempt to submit a doctored report to the National Green Tribunal is characteristic of its attitude towards Bellandur Lake and all its ills. In glossing over facts, it is attempting to escape responsibility. Now, with the IISc report contradicting its casual submission of burning grass and arson, the state should own up and tackle the real problem of pollution and sewage flow. In the face of scientific evidence, the authorities' argument will have no leg to stand on. The BDA should, instead, commit itself to saving the lake, besides its own face.