

Bellandur blaze: NGT slams govt, seeks list of steps taken

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BDA says crores spent on lake rejuvenation, BBMP says only Rs 80 lakh spent



Smoke billowing from Bellandur Lake on Friday after it caught fire.

BENGALURU: The National Green Tribunal has again rapped the state government on its knuckles for the massive fire at Bellandur Lake last week that took more than 24 hours to douse.

A bench headed by Justice U.D. Salvi asked what steps the government has taken to protect the lake, where big fires have broken out four times in the last two years. A report by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) states that the fires have been occurring repeatedly in the lake since the late 2000s, but not in the scale being seen now.

The NGT pulled up the government after Rajya Sabha member Kupendra Reddy, one of the petitioners, brought it to the Tribunal's notice. Advocate Ram Prasad, appearing for the petitioner, argued that the state has submitted four reports, listing out the steps it intended to take to rejuvenate the lake, but nothing has been done on the ground.

Advocate Devraj Ashok, representing the state, continued the argument of regulatory agencies, saying that the fire was triggered by miscreants by burning dry leaves and grass. He sought time till January 29, the next date of hearing, for the government to file the inquiry report on the reasons behind the fire.

On Tuesday, the BDA and BBMP were at loggerheads with the development authority saying it had spent crores of rupees on the rejuvenation of Bellandur Lake. But Mayor Sampath Raj said that the BDA had spent only Rs 80 lakh. "If BDA is not concerned about protecting the lake, we will rejuvenate it. The lake has caught fire four times in two years. We have to do everything possible to save the water body," the Mayor said.

The tribunal also asked Additional Chief Secretary Mahendra Jain to be present at the next hearing.

AAP lashes out at George Reacting to Bengaluru Development Minister K.J. George's statement that Bellandur Lake was set on fire intentionally by miscreants, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) spokesman Shivakumar Chengalaraya said that the statement is irresponsible and asked the minister to catch the culprits and send them to jail.

A press statement from AAP said, "Though Bengaluru is being internationally shamed due to total mismanagement of its solid and liquid waste and Bellandur Lake, in particular, the government has not woken up from its slumber."

"Not only the fire, but encroachments, unscientific management, land mafia and appointment of irresponsible people like Mr George are some of the other issues," it stated.

"The groundwater around Bellandur Lake is contaminated with not just toxic chemicals, but also about 20% of sewage. It appears that we are drinking water directly from toilet commodes. Storm water drains are clogged with garbage and dead animal carcasses are decomposing at the lake and contaminating groundwater," the statement read.

The AAP slammed MLA Raghu, who when questioned about the encroachment of Kagggadasapura lake, said that he did not owe an answer to 'every dog and jackal' on the street. Mr Chengalaraya said that the BDA cannot hide behind the excuse that it does not have enough funds to rejuvenate the lake.