

HC notice to govt over FIR to Ashoka in land case

**BENGALURU, DHNS:** The High Court of Karnataka on Friday issued notices to the state government, the Lokayukta and the Anti Corruption Bureau on a petition filed by former deputy chief minister R Ashoka in the Bagair Hukum land scam.

Ashoka has challenged the legality of an FIR registered by the ACB against him on November 9, 2017, over his alleged involvement in the scam. The ACB accused him of being one of the beneficiaries of the scam and alleged that the Bengaluru South Taluk Bagair Hukum Land Regularisation Committee (from 1998 to 2006) had allotted land to ineligible people. Ashoka chaired the committee in his capacity as the Uttarahalli MLA.

The BJP leader suggested that the ACB had registered the case to "malign" him. He argued that other members of the committee were "deliberately" omitted from the

# Loss of face awaits govt in Bellandur Lake case

## Karnataka has shown no interest in protecting the waterbody, charges petitioner

Bosky Khanna

**BENGALURU, DHNS: The fire on Friday at Bellanindur lake only makes matters worse for the state government with the National Green Tribunal.**

"We will bring it to the NGT's notice at the next hearing," said Sridhar Pabbisetty, petitioner in a case concerning the lake. On January 5 and 18, the tribunal had discussed the lake's conditions.

"The government has shown no interest in protecting the lake. No short-term measure has been implemented, except one-time cleaning of the lake," he said.

The authorities are only buying time and not showing results on the ground, Pabbisetty said. T V Ramachandra, member of the lake expert committee and professor at the Indian Institute of Science, said he had submitted his ob-



Smoke billows from the Bellandur Lake on Friday. DH PHOTO/SK DINESH

servations to Pabbisetty.

"Lake quality has not improved. The government has no responsibility. The grass around the lake is dry and the methane just aggravated the fire. This shows that the lake is highly polluted," he said.

Ramachandra had suggested to the BDA and lake expert

committee that the waterbody should be handed over to the Karnataka Lake Conservation and Development Authority as other agencies had proven incapable of handling the challenges. Pabbisetty said the government was not keeping to deadlines. "They have said sewage treatment plants will

come up. But there is nothing on the ground," he said.

It is now up to the government to explain to the tribunal why another fire had broken out, he remarked.

Ramachandra said that the government had still not been able to clear encroachments and prevent garbage dumping.

### Who started the fire?

- BDA Commissioner Rakesh Singh described the fire as accidental. "Flaring with orange flames and dense smoke, (it) engulfed the defence area," he said in a statement.
- The fire broke out at 9.30 am. Defence and state fire services personnel, co-ordinated by BDA officials, reached the spot at 11 am, he said.
- Singh attributed the dense smoke to burning muck (organic sludge). Villagers cut grass for cattle fodder. They smoke cigarettes and beedis while they are at it, and may have set off an accidental fire, he said.
- It is also likely the fire began with the igniting of dry grass and plastic waste. The methane in the lake could have aggravated it, he surmised.

### Why green tribunal is furious

- National Green Tribunal takes up suo motu case in February 2017.
- Shamed govt promises short, medium and long term measures.
- Sewage to the extent of 480 million litres enters lake every day.
- First of four big fires broke out in 2015. Last was in 2016.

However, G Ranga Rao, Karnataka State Pollution Control Board member, said the water quality had improved in the lake as some industries and apartment complexes had stopped releasing sewage into the lake. Frothing has also come down, by his reckoning. "Security guards for lake"

Karnataka Lake Conservation and Development Authority chief executive officer Seema Garg, who had admitted before the NGT that solid waste was still being dumped in the lake, said the BDA should deploy guards to protect the waterbody.

"The fire could be intention-

al or accidental. Fencing everywhere is not possible because of the topography, so there is need for guards around the lake," she said. Meanwhile, BDA commissioner Rakesh Singh said, "We have decided to get a detailed study done on the fire to understand the nature of the pollutants."