

# State will save lakes to cope with imminent water shortage

BY JAIDEEP V.G.

**Bangalore, Aug. 10:** Environmental experts in the city say water scarcity will be the biggest problem faced by Bangalore in the next century. Depleting water in the city's lakes will reduce groundwater levels, causing a severe water shortage.

According to sources in the forest department, which is in charge of conserving lakes, a red list of cities to be hit by water shortage in the next century compiled by the Central Water Commission puts Bangalore second after Chennai.

Meanwhile, plans are on to save lakes in Bangalore and other districts. According to the conservator of forests, Bangalore range, Mr Praveen Chandra, his department has drafted a plan to obtain funds from either the Centre or external agencies to carry out desilting of lakes. "We will start work on conserving three big lakes in the city. Tenders have been announced to desilt the lakes this year," said Mr Chandra. The lakes marked for desilting are at Kengeri, Hallige Hodeyana Halli and Doddabommasandra.

Apart from this, a plan drafted by the forest department to develop 200 lakes in the state, including 50 in Bangalore, has been sent to the Centre. "The proposed budget for this project is Rs 600 crore. If the Centre does not respond, we will have to

'approach external agencies for funds," said Mr Chandra. His department had sent a proposal to desilt 37 lakes in Bangalore two years back. "The project cost was Rs 17 crore. The Centre is yet to implement the project," he added.

According to him, lakes play an important role in determining the water table of a region. "A direct link between lakes and ground water has been established. It has been found that areas surrounding lakes have groundwater at higher levels," he explained. "As Bangalore is not near a river or any other major water body, our only water has to be from lakes replenishing groundwater, and if we let our lakes die we will have nowhere to go for water," he said.

According to him, lakes in Bangalore face three main problems. "The first is silt collection in lakes, the second, sewage contamination and the third, drying up of lakes. Of these, the first problem has to be tackled immediately," he said. Agreeing with him, Dr P.K. Shetty, a research scientist at the National Institute of Advanced studies, said, "Silt is the main culprit depleting water levels in lakes. Added to this, domestic effluents and construction waste are being dumped into our lakes, slowly suffocating them," he explained.

Mr Chandra said the desilting of lakes has to be tackled with care. "In Chandigarh, when silt

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collected in an artificial lake, engineers removed the silt at a great cost and two years later found that silt had collected again. Desilting is not the best solution, it has to be complemented by an efficient water table management program," he said.

Maintaining a water table involves releasing water into lakes in stages, holding back silt at every stage until water devoid of silt enters the lake. "The biggest threat for lakes are farms. Farmers have to initiate steps to hold back silt," Mr Chandra said.

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