

Water mismanagement leaves India's Silicon Valley parched

By Aijaz Rahi
The Associated Press

BANGALORE, India — India's Silicon Valley is bracing for yet another thirsty summer.

Faucets are running dry and the lakes that once nurtured the southern city of Bangalore and its nearly 10 million residents are either parched or fetid with industrial waste and toxic effluents.

Much like Cape Town in South Africa, Bangalore's water woes have been in the making for some time. Years of unplanned urbanization, rapid population growth, and poor management of water resources have now reached a critical point in the southern Indian metropolis.

A 2016 study by the Energy and Wetlands Research Group at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore showed that the city's water bodies declined by as much as 80 percent between 1973 and 2016.

Over that same period, the concrete area in the city, once known for its gardens and lakes, went up by more than 1,000 percent.

T.V. Ramachandra, the scientist who led the study, said mismanagement of both land and water resources has led to the current crisis, in which the city is now critically dependent on the Cauvery river and the annual monsoon rains as its principal sources of drinking water.

The lakes that once provided natural rainwater reservoirs and helped recharge groundwater have largely given up the fight against rampant encroachment. The few that have survived the onslaught are struggling.

Images of Bellandur Lake, the city's largest water body, covered with a foamy mix of filth, routinely make the headlines.

Another major lake, Ulsoor, is choked with garbage and construction waste and is gasping under a blanket of thick waterweeds.

And as the thirsty city looks desperately for water, borewells are digging deeper and deeper, each year depleting what remains of the city's groundwater.

Large water storage tanks line the rooftops of Bangalore's new commercial and residential buildings, which are almost entirely dependent on private



PARCHED PROBLEM. Women collect water (top photo) at a public tap in a poor residential neighborhood in Bangalore, India. India's Silicon Valley is bracing for yet another thirsty summer. Faucets are running dry and the lakes that once nurtured the southern city of Bangalore and its nearly 10 million residents are either parched or fetid with industrial waste and toxic effluents. In the bottom photo, a security guard in Bangalore checks the water level of tanks placed on top of a residential building to store water. (AP Photos/Aijaz Rahi)

"There is severe crisis. The actual sufferers are the poor people living in the slums," said rainwater harvesting expert Ayyappa Masagi.

"Rich people can afford to buy water. Poor people are spending like 2 to 5 rupees (5 to 10 cents) per pot of water," he said. That's a significant cost for people who sometimes make less than 200 rupees per day.

With Bangalore's population likely to reach 20 million by 2031, the city's water troubles are likely to get worse.

Water stations have already popped up across the city for people to buy drinking water.

One resident, S.R. Reddy, said he was spending more than \$20 a month to buy water for his family.

"We spend one fourth of our earnings for water," he said.

Experts in Bangalore say the problem is not the availability of water but its management.

Ramachandra, of the Indian Institute of Science, said his study showed that almost 70 percent of the city's water requirement could be effectively harvested from its annual rainfall.

The study also recommended working with local communities and ensuring their participation in lake rejuvenation and waste management plans.

Some citizens' groups in Bangalore have begun to collaborate with the city administration to help restore the fresh water lakes.

Not too long ago, one of the city's oldest lakes, Agara Lake, was heavily polluted.

With funding from the state government, a project to manage the sewage inflow, remove weeds, and de-silt the lake started in 2016.

The lake is now showing signs of revival.

water suppliers.

A study recently published in a leading environmental magazine, *Down to Earth*, said Bangalore could go the Cape Town way — and face acute water scarcity in the not-too-distant future.

The study said the water table in

Bangalore has fallen from 10-12 meters to 76-91 meters below the surface in the last two decades as the number of extraction wells soared.

Mobile tankers have become the water lifeline for the city's poorer residents, who line up every day to fill buckets and pots.

Success Begins at Clark College!

- Academic Excellence
- Easy transfer to top-rated universities
- Low cost – Great value
- No TOEFL or IELTS admission requirements
- Intensive English Language Program

www.clark.edu/international
E-mail: international@clark.edu
eBrochure: www.clark.mktracker.com
Phone: (360) 992-2390

Clark College
Office of International Programs, GHL 216
1933 Fort Vancouver Way
Vancouver, Washington 98663 U.S.A.

hop
fastpass®
TRANSIT FARE CARD

Your new ticket to ride.
Just tap your Hop card or phone to ride the bus, train or streetcar. Get started at myhopcard.com.