

Expansion of Bengaluru - Mysuru highway comes at an environmental cost

18 February 2020



The Bengaluru-Mysuru highway is being expanded to facilitate faster travel between the two cities.



Bhimenahalli Lake, near Bidadi, has been divided into two by a 150-metre-wide earthen dam, upon which foundations for pillars are being laid. DH

The expansion of the Mysuru-Bengaluru highway may cut down travel time between the two cities to 90 minutes but is set to come with an environmental cost as the road's last leg is set to cross over a lake near Bidadi.

The village of Bhimenahalli or 'Forest House' (as it is known in Kannada) is a pit stop along the National Highway 275, about 15.5 kilometres southwest of Kengeri Satellite Town. Residents said that the village once stood at the edge of a thick forest. Today, only Bhimenahalli Lake, located on the other side of the highway, still dominates the landscape. Sources described the water quality of the government lake as "excellent", pointing out that it even hosts a fish farm.

That may change as the final stretch of the six-lane highway is set to cut through the lake before winding left to connect with a planned toll plaza astride National Highway 275. According to sources, 13 pillars are set to be erected within the lake area, most of them on the lakebed. While the Supreme Court has banned the building of roadways over lakes, a National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) official said that all permissions had been given to extend the highway over Bhimenahalli Lake.

“We would not be carrying out the work otherwise,” the NHAI official said. Meantime, Ramanagara Deputy Commissioner, M S Archana, expressed ignorance about the bridge being built over the lake. “We are not doing the acquisition for this project. Our office was not involved in clearing this project. It was all done by the NHAI,” she said.

When DH visited the site on February 3, the lake had been divided into two by a 150-metre-wide earthen dam, upon which foundations for pillars were being laid. Clarity could not be obtained from officials about whether the dam would be removed after the pillars were laid. The NHAI official refused to answer further questions on the matter, citing it as “sensitive”.

Environmentalist Leo Saldanha disputed the legality of building the bridge over the lake, saying that no government entities have permission to build over lakes or any waterbodies.

“In 2012, the NHAI was building the airport road, which affected a lake and we brought it to the notice of the Chief Justice who informed the NHAI lawyer that serious consequences would ensue if they built anywhere near the lake. So there is a precedent for stopping such projects,” he said.

Ramprasad V, a co-founder of Friends of Lakes, however, pointed out a loophole in the Karnataka Tank Conservation and Development Authority and Certain Other Law (Amendment) Act, 2018. “The Supreme Court is clear on the matter of lake projects, but the amendment to Section 12 of the Act authorises the ‘construction of roads, bridges and other allied works with tank areas’,” he said.

Source: <https://www.deccanherald.com/city/bengaluru-infrastructure/expansion-of-bengaluru-mysuru-highway-comes-at-an-environmental-cost-805733.html>