


Stinking Beira suffering due to broken sewage line

8 February 2019 01:56 am  - 0  - 732


STINKING BEIRA

Suffering due to broken sewage line

Activists levelled allegations that the growth formations on the surface of the water in these areas have now resulted in the formation of methane

Known to be one of the iconic landmarks in Colombo, the Beira Lake has added much attraction and historical significance to the cityscape. However over the recent past, the Lake has been frowned upon due to the continuous stench emanating from the polluted body of water, which makes life difficult for those working and residing in close proximity.

Allegations have been levelled against the authorities by concerned parties, including environmental activists, that the once tranquil Beira is yet again suffering from neglect and desecration. For over six weeks, one of the main sewage lines has ceased to function due to a breakdown, releasing sewage into the lake. With this leak, sections of the lake, lying between high profile development properties, have turned into an unnatural green colour with dark spots, but the authorities don't seem to be taking prompt action. Activists also levelled allegations that the growth formations on the surface of water in these areas have now resulted in the formation of methane.

By
**Kalani Kumarasinghe and
Kamanthi Wickremesinghe**



Harmful algal bloom

The **Daily Mirror**, learned that the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) engineering team was aware of this incident and that they were working on rectifying the situation. However according to information received by a source, who wished to remain anonymous, the team of engineers had revealed that since they were repairing the sewage pumping stations, they had to divert the sewage to the lake as they had no option.

When contacted, the Head of Engineering at CMC was not available for an explanation as he required permission from the Commissioner. This has raised doubts among engineers as to why the CMC couldn't divert the sewage to one of the three sewage outfalls situated in Ratmalana, Wellawatte and Modara. Officials at the Ports Authority and the Urban Development Authority too were not available for comment.



"However according to information received by a source, who wished to remain anonymous, the team of engineers had revealed that since they were repairing the sewage pumping stations, they had to divert the sewage to the lake as they had no option"

Speaking to the Daily Mirror, General Manager of the Marine Environment Protection Authority Dr. Terney Pradeep Kumara identified the growth visible on the surface of sections of the lake as an algal bloom. An algal bloom, also known as algae bloom, is a rapid increase in the population of algae in an aquatic system. They occur in both freshwater and marine environments and are often recognised by the discolouration of the water, as a result of the high density of pigmented cells.

When colonies of algae — simple plants that live in the sea and freshwater — grow out of control and produce toxic or harmful effects on living organisms in the water and surrounding area, it is usually identified as a harmful algal bloom. "In ocean and freshwater environments, an algal bloom will eventually lead to a hypoxia condition", Dr. Kumara noted. "Hypoxia refers to low or depleted oxygen in a water body and is often associated with the overgrowth of certain species of algae, which can lead to oxygen depletion, followed by the death of all organisms," he explained.



'Only responsible for cleaning'

The **Daily Mirror**, also contacted the Deputy General Manager (Drainage and Reclamation) of the Sri Lanka Land Reclamation and Development Corporation (SLLRDC) S.P. Muthumala to inquire into the development. Muthumala said that the SLLRDC has not been notified of any breakdown related to sewerage lines. "We're only responsible for the cleaning of the water body of the Beira lake. We have not been informed of a breakdown of a sewerage pipe or a requirement to clean the water body, as a result of such a leakage," he said. "However we have been carrying out dredging activities of the Beira lake on the east and west, for over a month now. Since the dredging too involves pipes, anyone can easily be misled that there's a breakdown of a sewerage line," he added.

Dredging is a the removal of sediments and debris from the bottom of water bodies such as lakes and harbours. It is a routine necessity in waterways, as sedimentation or the natural process of sand and silt accumulation, can decrease the depth of a body of water, especially when water bodies in and around cities are often contaminated with a variety of pollutants. It is also carried out to minimise the effects of exposure of fish and other organisms to contaminants and also to prevent the spread of contaminants to other areas of the water body.

Fact box		
One of the main sewage lines has ceased to function due to a breakdown, releasing sewage into the lake.	The Sections of the lake lying between high profile development properties have turned into an unnatural green colour with dark spots, but the authorities don't seem to be taking prompt action.	The growth visible on the surface of sections of the lake as an algal bloom. An algal bloom also known as algae bloom is a rapid increase in the population of algae in an aquatic system.

While the Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development was granted approval to implement a major development project known as the 'Beira Lake Intervention Area Development Plan' last year in June, the authority was also granted approval to conserve and develop the banks of Beira, prior to any construction. At the time, officials revealed that more than 70 Government and private institutions with over 1,000 smaller private bodies and residential properties in the area dumped garbage and waste in the lake. The dumping of medical waste in the Beira was observed as another significant factor contributing to the degrading ecological system in and around the lake, over the years.

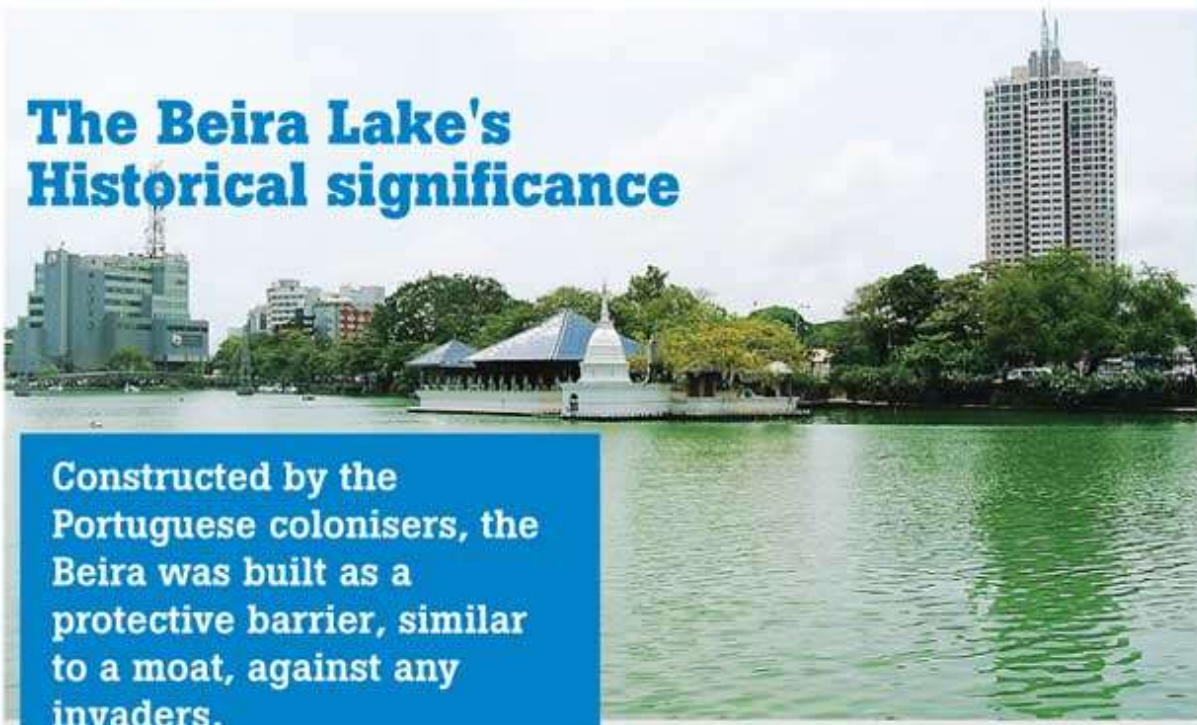
Meanwhile the Colombo sewage disposal system is believed to be over 85 years old; overloaded and out-dated. Although the need for its urgent upgrade has been highlighted in different forums, tangible action on the issue is yet to be witnessed. A sewage consultant speaking to the Daily Mirror underscored that while the sewage disposal system of the city is complex, the breakdown of sewage lines and the resultant release of sewage into the Beira is only an eventuality. It is evident that a lack of coordination not only among responsible authorities, but also industry stakeholders, who are contributors to the issue, is leading to growing concerns over health and sanitation standards of Colombo.

Pix by Damith Wickramasinghe



- **For over six weeks, one of the main sewage lines has ceased to function**
- **Dr. Terney Pradeep Kumara identified the growth visible on the surface of sections of the lake as an algal bloom**
- **Dredging is the removal of sediments and debris from the bottom of water bodies such as lakes and harbours**
- **The dumping of medical waste in the Beira was observed as another significant factor contributing to the degrading ecological system**
- **doubts are raised as to why the CMC couldn't divert the sewage to one of the three sewage outfalls situated in Ratmalana, Wellawatte and Modara**

The Beira Lake's Historical significance



Constructed by the Portuguese colonisers, the Beira was built as a protective barrier, similar to a moat, against any invaders.

When the Portuguese eventually surrendered, the Dutch expanded the boundaries of Beira by flooding the low lying areas and building on higher ground, in 1656.

It is the popular belief that the lake was named after Dutch engineer De Beer who built the moats in colonised Colombo fort.

The British attacked the Dutch fort at Colombo in 1795 using the same strategy that the Dutch used against the Portuguese, by crossing the lake.

The British used the lake for more ceremonial and recreational purposes.

- A body of water flowing downstream between Dematagoda hill and Saint Sebastian hill was used to connect to another channel, creating what is known as the Beira lake today.
- Initially was used as a means of transporting goods, inland and beyond.
- This also gave birth to several islands, such as the slave island.
- Land reclamation and other interventions from 1900 to 1920 saw a considerable reduction of the extensive waterscape especially through the Lake Development Scheme.

© DM GraphicDesk

Comments - 0

Add comment

Comments will be edited (grammar, spelling and slang) and authorized at the discretion of Daily Mirror online. The website also has the right not to publish selected comments.

Post a new comment :

Full Name:

Email Address: