

Explain steps to protect water bodies, forests: high court tells Tamil Nadu chief secretary

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CHENNAI: The Madras high court has ordered Tamil Nadu chief secretary to come out with a comprehensive status report on steps being taken to protect water bodies, forests, 'whatever is left of the coastal regions and nature so that future generations find the state habitable and can survive here'.

"It cannot be a piece-meal solution pertaining to one matter or one area or one waterbody, though the aggregate has to take care of the individual," the first bench of Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice P D Audikesavalu said on Wednesday.

The bench passed the order while censuring the state for failing to remove largescale encroachments in Chitlapakkam lake inspite of court orders.

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When the plea came up for hearing on Wednesday, government pleader Muthukumar submitted that 403 encroachments identified in the area could not be removed as several of them have obtained stay from the court.

Refusing to accept the contention, the court said, “it appears to be the age-old ploy of blaming the court for effective action not being taken.”

There is a waterbody which covers various survey numbers and the extent of the lake should not be difficult to ascertain from revenue records. These lakes and water bodies not only nourish life but provide for year-round water in a state where perennial flowing water is not available and groundwater levels are not amenable for extraction everywhere, the bench said.

“However, other considerations overtake executive prudence and the executive turns a blind eye to rampant encroachment without making any serious endeavour to protect the water bodies and other natural features, including forests,” the judges added.

“The case at hand is no different. More often than not, the executive pays lip-service to removal of encroachment by not following the procedure established by law or by deliberately breaching the principles of natural justice which give a justifiable right to a person to come to court and obtain a stay,” the court said. “It is such a stay, which at times is engineered by the state by its inaction or improper action, that is cited before the court once again to thwart the endeavour to protect water bodies or forests,” the judges asserted.