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Stir threat over exploitation of farm wells

The residents of southern suburbs reiterate demand for crackdown on water mafia outfits

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TAMBARAM Blaming the indiscriminate extraction of water from farm wells by private lorry operators as the cause for a dip in overall ground water levels, residents all over the southern suburbs of Chennai and activists have urged the Kancheepuram district administration to crack down on water mafia outfits operating here.

Concerned at the sharp dip in the ground water level in their locality, a group of residents of Rose Nagar in Kovilambakkam panchayat near Tambaram met on Sunday to decide on the course of action they had to adopt to put an end to extraction of water from farm wells.

Stating that extraction of water for commercial purposes was a clear violation of the established norms, the residents have decided to take up the issue at the highest level of the State Government. If there was no positive response, they would not hesitate to resort to an agitation by squatting on Medavakkam Main Road, said office-bearers of the Rose Nagar Residents Welfare Association.

The residents recalled that when they began to move into the locality about a decade ago, water was available at a depth of 10 feet and it had now dipped to an average depth of 100 feet, all because of extraction of water from wells.

Apart from depletion of ground water, they were also faced with other problems too: the perpetual menace of rash driving by water tanker drivers, severely damaged roads due to the movement of the vehicles and the non-stop functioning of noisy motors through the night.

Their petitions are pending at the offices of the Kancheepuram Collectorate and Kovilambakkam panchayat and also at the Tambaram Taluk Office. "It is surprising how authorities can be so silent and indifferent even after an illegal activity is brought to their notice," said D. James, president of the association.

Office-bearers of civic groups alleged that water tanker operators were allowed a free run despite the activity being banned under provisions of the Chennai

Metropolitan Area Groundwater (Regulation) Act. While admitting that water drawn from wells here was meant for residents of the water-starved Chennai city for drinking or other purposes, they said that Rose Nagar residents in the suburbs should not be made to pay the price.

They said that in their locality alone, more than 400 lorryloads of water were transported out daily, after drawing water from four farm wells.

The Kovilambakkam panchayat had laid only metal roads which suffered an extensive damage. School vans and autorickshaws refused to enter their locality.

Some of the water tanker crew threatened residents who questioned rash driving the residents charged.

The Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board and the revenue authorities of Kancheepuram district should conduct a joint inspection of the southern suburbs and find the commercial exploitation of water and the blatant violation of provisions of the law meant for protecting this precious resource, the Rose Nagar residents said.



FALL-OUT: *A road in Rose Nagar, which has a tell-tale sign of movement of lorries extracting water from farm wells.*