

“Buckingham Canal turns Long Sewer”



With No Officials To Fear, Residents Let Untreated Sewage Directly Into Water Bodies



BUCKINGHAM CANAL TURNS LONG SEWER

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In the thick of civic poll preparations, officials seem to be too busy to tackle highly polluted water bodies near villages along Old Mahabalipuram Road (OMR).

Residential complexes and colonies of independent houses take advantage of the lack of elected local bodies and let out untreated waste from on-campus sewage treatment facilities into Buckingham Canal and the Muttukadu backwaters. And on the other end, congested canals result in flooding of Thazhambur off OMR.

These long pending woes of residents of the IT highway have not been addressed for years. However, the upcoming rural local body elections for village panchayats in Chengalpattu district has brought issues back under the spotlight.

The urbanised villages between Navalur and Kelambakkam are dotted with skyscrapers and gated communities. More families moved to the city's peripheries for a quieter life resulting in a spike in population. This migration, however, has taken a massive toll on OMR's ecology given the absence of basic amenities and infrastructure, including a sewerage system and segregated garbage collection.

The pristine Muttukadu backwaters in Navalur's backyard has been reduced to a stinky sewer. Not a surprising development as a dump yard is found adjacent to the water body. Sewage let out by independent houses reaches the back-

waters through a dedicated channel and in addition, gated communities release waste from the STP into the water body. A board erected by the local body warning criminal and penal action against those dumping garbage and letting sewage into the Buckingham Canal is clearly not viewed as a threat by violators.

"Just 15 years ago, Navalur



TRASH TROUBLES: Residents lack basic infrastructure such as a sewerage system and segregated garbage collection

used to depend on fish sourced from the backwaters with boats navigating the canal. Now frogs cannot survive as the water body is polluted," said retired Major General Jose Manavaian, who is part of the SWA Muttukadu Backwaters Campaign.

Locals are rightly annoyed especially since their neighbours in Greater Chennai Corporation areas have a robust system of source segregation of solid waste.

Gated communities can afford services of private waste management companies. But for other residents, waste is collected by re-

spective local bodies and brought to landfills on tractors.

Meanwhile, overgrown vegetation is choking 30 canals that divert excess rainwater from Siruseri to Muttukadu backwaters. As a result, areas like Thazhambur frequently grapple with excessive flooding that forced people during the monsoon in 2020 to commute by tractors just to reach the arterial roads. Those in high rises and gated communities were marooned for a few days. BV Pradeep, a resident of Thazhambur for seven years, called for the linking of channels to allow free flow of rainwater. "This would prevent a repeat of 2020 when the locals suffered due to inundation," he added.

Population on this stretch
2.5 lakh
(approx.)

Daily garbage generated
250
tonnes

- WHAT'S AILING RESIDENTS**
- > Absence of sewerage system
 - > Absence of piped water connections to most newly developed areas
 - > Pollution of Buckingham Canal and Muttukadu backwaters
 - > Garbage collection

Gated complexes closed for campaigns shoot self in foot

Times News Network

The election fervour seems to have brought to the fore the disconnect between the long-time locals in village panchayats, poll candidates and those staying in gated communities along the OMR.

Contestants in the poll fray aren't allowed to canvass in some apartment complexes and gated communities. This leads to some friction post election when the communities approach elected local body representatives and the panchayat over civic issues.

For instance, the absence of piped water connections to households along OMR is a major issue. While old habitations in these villages have piped water lines, the new communities don't have basic amenities, a problem that echoes all along the arterial road. These communities, hence, largely depend on private water tankers. However, their issue goes unnoticed during the election frenzy as candidates confine their campaigns to

places they have free access to such as localities with independent houses. But, candidates can't engage with voters in several gated communities.

Haresha Koda, co-founder of Federation of OMR Resident Associations (FOMRRA), said candidates should be allowed to campaign on premises of gated communities and the Resident Welfare Association (RWA) must ensure that Covid SOPs are followed. "We are planning for a webinar with local body candidates and RWAs so the two can interact on civic issues during the first week of October," he said. FOMRRA had conducted similar interactions during the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in 2019 and 2021, he added.

Padur resident and founder of a waste management firm I Prayudharshini emphasised the importance of those in gated communities voting in rural local body elections. "The elected local body has more powers in resolving civic issues and it is the responsibility of residents to exercise their franchise," she added.

News Item in The Times of India newspaper, Chennai Edition dated 23rd September 2021

CHENNAI: In the thick of civic poll preparations, officials seem to be too busy to tackle highly polluted water bodies near villages along Old Mahabalipuram Road (OMR). Residential complexes and colonies of independent houses take advantage of the lack of elected local bodies and are letting out untreated waste and sedimentary dregs from on-campus sewage treatment facilities into Buckingham Canal and the Muttukadu

backwaters. And on the other end, congested canals result in flooding of Thazhambur off OMR. These long pending woes of residents of the IT highway have not been addressed for years. However, the upcoming rural local body elections for village panchayats in Chengalpet district has brought these issues back to the forefront.

The urbanised villages between Navalur and Kelambakkam are dotted with skyscrapers and gated communities. More families moved to the city's peripheries for a quieter life resulting in a spike in population, currently at 2.5 lakh. This migration, however, has taken a massive toll on OMR's ecology given the absence of basic amenities and infrastructure, including a sewerage system and segregated garbage collection.

"The pristine Muttukadu backwaters in Navalur's backyard has been reduced to a stinky sewer. Not a surprising development as a dump yard is found adjacent to the massive water body. Sewage let out by independent houses reaches the backwaters through a dedicated channel and in addition, several gated communities release waste water from the STP into the water body. A board erected by the local body warning criminal and penal action against those dumping garbage and letting sewage into the Buckingham Canal is clearly not viewed as a threat by violators who continue with the indiscriminate pollution.

"Just 15 years ago, Navalur used to depend on fish sourced from the backwaters with boats navigating the canal. But, now frogs cannot survive as the water body is polluted due to untreated sewage and garbage," said retired Major General Jose Manavalan, who is part of the Save Muttukadu Backwaters Campaign. Locals are rightly annoyed especially since their neighbours in Greater Chennai Corporation areas have a robust system of solid waste segregation at source. Gated communities can afford services of private waste management companies. But for other residents, waste is collected by respective local bodies and brought to landfills on tractors.

Meanwhile, overgrown vegetation is choking 26 canals that divert excess rainwater from Siruseri to Muttukadu backwaters. As a result, areas like Thazambur frequently grapple with excessive flooding that forced people during the monsoon in 2020 to commute by tractors just to reach the arterial roads. Those in high rises and gated communities were marooned for a few days. B V Pradeep, a resident of Thazhambur for seven years, called for the linking of channels to allow free flow of rainwater. "This would prevent a repeat of 2020 when the locals suffered due to inundation," he added.