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SWACHH SURVEKSHAN

2023

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Bengaluru, the tech capital of India, has been facing garbage crisis for a long time. Inconsistent waste segregation practices have made the crisis compounding, and many areas in the City have been left high and dry due to this. Despite citizens' efforts to segregate their waste, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) workers allegedly mix it all together once collected. "We segregate waste diligently, but the collectors dump it all together in the truck," Anupama Shetty, a college professor from Yelahanka told Salar News. "What's the point of segregation if BBMP doesn't follow it?" she asked. Dry waste collection centres, which sort and recycle waste, are in short supply. There are only 164 centres, even though the City needs at least 198.

UNSORTED TRASH TALES

Poor waste segregation compound Bengaluru's garbage crisis, reports **Hameed Ashraf**

SOUTH ZONE: THE BIGGEST WASTE GENERATOR

According to BBMP, across the City's eight zones — East, West, South, Yelahanka, Bommanahalli, Mahadevapura, RR Nagar and Dasarahalli — maximum waste is generated from the South, followed by East and West; the least waste generation is from Dasarahalli. The South Zone, home to the City's largest population of 30 lakh, generates over 1,000 tonnes of waste daily. Among the most waste-generating areas in this zone is BTM Layout, which alone produces close to 300 tonnes of waste, followed by Chickpet, Byatarayanapura, Chamarajpet, and Bommanahalli. While many upscale neighbourhoods are adopting segregation, slums and unregulated areas lag. "Segregation rates in South Zone hover around 50 per cent. The challenge is to bring informal settlements into the formal waste collection system," Rajesh Kumar, Health Inspector, South Zone told Salar News.



EAST ZONE: A HOTSPOT FOR COMMERCIAL WASTE

The East Zone, known for its commercial hubs such as Whitefield, Marathahalli and Indiranagar, generates about 800 tonnes of waste daily. A large portion of this waste comes from offices, malls and eateries, with mixed waste being a big challenge. BBMP Assistant Executive Engineer Anand Reddy said, "Corporate entities have embraced waste segregation better than many residential areas." Daily per capita waste generated from residential houses is pegged at 309g and from slums it is 300g. According to BBMP, 58.5 per cent of the waste generated is from households, 49.7 per cent from commercial establishments and 6.8 per cent from street sweeping.

WEST ZONE: MARKET AREAS STRUGGLE TO MANAGE LOAD

The West Zone generates 700 tonnes of waste daily, dominated by wet waste from the KR Market. Shivanna, a vegetable trader at KR Market, told Salar News that the market is a mess after 11 am daily. "BBMP workers collect waste in the morning but by noon, it's back to square one. We're constantly surrounded by flies and foul smells," he said. Rukmini K, Joint Health Officer for West Zone, claimed that the only way to solve the issue is via public awareness. Rapid urbanisation in RR Nagar led to an increase in waste generation, now at 600 tonnes daily. Segregation remains a concern in these newly developed areas. Manjunath MS, a resident of Nayandahalli, said, "Due to inefficient garbage collection, residents have started using the stretch to discard their garbage."

NORTH ZONE: RESIDENTIAL & COMMERCIAL AREAS IN EQUAL MEASURE

The North Zone, which includes commercial and residential areas such as KR Puram, Byatarayanapura, Yeshwanthapur, Dasarahalli, Mahalakshmi Layout, Malleshwaram, Hebbal and Pulakeshinagar, generates approximately 600 to 800 tonnes of waste per day. A senior engineer from the BBMP's Solid Waste Management team, on the condition of anonymity, said, "The garbage problem persists due to poor transparency and accountability in the system."

BACK-TO-BACK ROADBLOCKS FOR BBMP

In 2023, BBMP floated 89 tenders for door-to-door garbage collection in 243 wards, at Rs 590 crore per year. It was put on hold indefinitely after the tenders' faced allegations of collusion among bidders, and the BBMP Garbage Contractors' Association blamed the BBMP for fixing low rates to help bidders. This September, the government decided to send nearly half of the City's garbage to Doddaballapur, Bidadi, Mandur and Gollahalli. However, this was scrapped after protests from residents and local MLAs. A major issue contributing to the poor garbage management is the lack of BBMP elections, which have not been held since 2020. This has led to infighting and a lack of accountability, with officials blaming each other for the garbage mess.

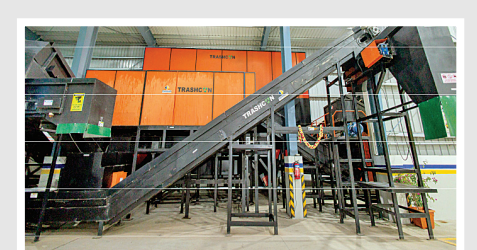


SM KRISHNA'S SINGAPORE DREAM

Bengaluru has long sought solutions to its growing garbage problem. In 2000, then chief minister SM Krishna introduced a door-to-door garbage collection system, hoping to clean up Bengaluru and model it after the swanky Singapore. At the time, there was far less plastic packaging and waste generation was relatively low. However, as the City expanded, the waste challenge grew exponentially.

WHERE ARE THE DUSTBINS?

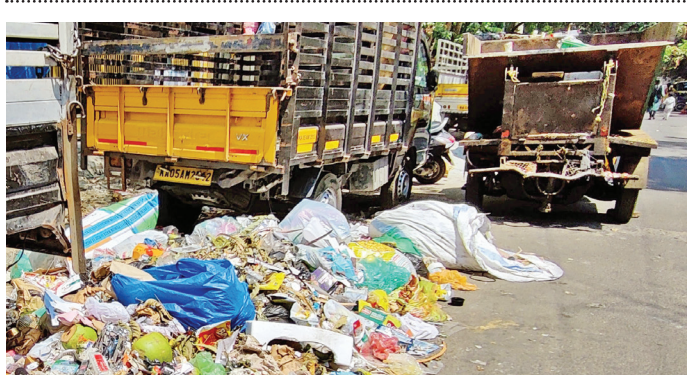
In 2017, BBMP acknowledged the failure of the door-to-door collection system, particularly in commercial and slum areas. Hence, it reintroduced garbage bins for segregating dry and wet waste for Rs 4 crore. Unfortunately, the City suffers from a dearth of dustbins. A BBMP official told Salar News, "The dry and wet waste bins were introduced but are not in use in most places. This is because the City has been struggling with waste management for years."



The Automated Waste Segregation Machine established in Chamarajpet division was launched on 28 November PHOTO: BBMP

THE WAY FORWARD

BBMP Chief Tushar Girinath told Salar News that the civic agency is aiming to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills by introducing new waste processing facilities, including a waste-to-energy plant in Bidadi. This facility is expected to handle 600 tonnes of waste daily and generate 11.5 megawatts of power, he said. BBMP proposed an increase in the solid waste management cess earlier this year. The proposal suggests raising monthly cess for households from Rs 30-50 to Rs 100. BBMP has also submitted a proposal to the government to impose a cess of Rs 12 per kg of waste on bulk generators, such as apartments, hotels and malls.



Overworked, underpaid, unprotected: Unsung pourakarmikas have it rough

Bengaluru's garbage management system relies heavily on dedicated but overburdened pourakarmikas. These unsung heroes are the backbone of the City's cleanliness efforts but their relentless work comes at a steep cost: severe staff shortages, health complications and a lack of resources that often leave them exhausted and unheard. **HAMEED ASHRAF** documents their plight

THEY NEED JOB SECURITY

BBMP oversees the City's waste management but it has long struggled with a shortage of pourakarmikas. BBMP deploys one worker for every 700 residents, covering at least 550m in an eight-hour shift. Meena, a pourakarmika from West Zone, told Salar News, "On paper, there are 20 workers in our ward. But in reality, only 12 of us are here. We are expected to cover three times the area we used to."

stretch from early morning until late evening. "We lift heavy bins, walk for miles, and still get yelled at by residents if the garbage isn't cleared on time," he said. Contract-based workers, such as Kumar, who have been with the BBMP for five years, live without job security and with a salary of Rs 12,000 to 17,000. "We don't have medical insurance, and if we fall sick, we lose wages," he said. BBMP Chief

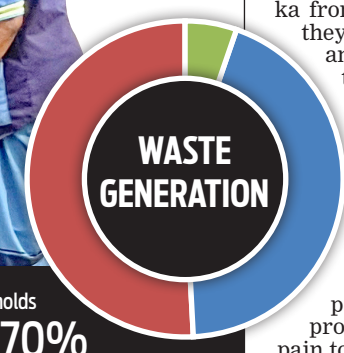
Commissioner Tushar Girinath blamed administrative delays and budget constraints for the shortage. "We are increasing their numbers. We've also introduced mechanised waste collection vehicles to reduce their workload, but the transition takes time," he said.



YOUR DIRT, THEIR BARE HANDS

Next time you dispose of used diapers and uneaten food without proper packaging, think about the pourakarmikas who clean your rubbish with their bare hands as BBMP and contractors fail to provide them with necessary protective gear, such as gloves and masks. As a result of which, many suffer from respiratory problems, skin infections and debilitating back pain. Radha, a 58-year-old pourakarmika from South Zone, said that they are not provided with any safety kits. "During the pandemic, we were given thin gloves that tore easily, and masks weren't regularly provided. We are exposed to harmful chemicals and rotting garbage every day," she added. Health issues are rampant among these workers, with 88 per cent reporting recurring problems, ranging from chest pain to breathing difficulties. In 2023, the State government can-

celled a Rs 15 crore fund earmarked for uniforms and safety equipment for sanitation workers. "By halting the designated funds, the government has risked their lives. All waste workers, including contract workers, must be covered by Employees' State Insurance (ESI) and provided with the safety equipment they need," said Maitreyi Krishnan from All India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU). Girinath told Salar News that most of the workers are contract-based and that contractors do not provide protective gear to cut costs. "BBMP has limited enforcement power over all contract workers," he added. "To improve the safety and working conditions of pourakarmikas, the BBMP has launched comprehensive health screenings, including cancer tests. A few NGOs have also come forward to monitor the regular and effective distribution of personal protective equipment," the BBMP Chief said.



PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD, HAMEED ASHRAF, DESIGN: G VISHWANATHA