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Jigani unit spewing venom

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The dumping of pharmaceutical waste at Srirampura on Sunday night has come as a blessing in disguise to villagers close to the source of the waste, the Karnataka Chemsyn Limited, at Jigani Industrial Area. The Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) had, on Thursday, ordered the closure of the factory.

On Friday, however, the factory was open and functional. DNA reporters visited the area, but were not allowed inside the premises of the factory. Employees refused to speak to the media, and the management was not available for comment.

Residents of the Konasandra village, a kilometer away from the factory, have lived with the pollutants for a long while, inconvenienced but not fully realising the harm it was doing. The Manchenahalli lake, close to the factory, too has been contaminated.

Devaraj, a resident of Konasandra, said, "The waste is just dumped here. We have dug borewells and found the water strange, nearly 30 borewells have been closed in two villages neighbouring the factory." He added that three years ago, stray cattle had died after drinking water in Konasandra. "People here need help. The government must act," he said.

Muniraju, a building contractor who has worked at the factory, said that the groundwater in a one-kilometre radius has been contaminated.

"We dug a borewell during the construction of a building nearby, and just could not bear the stench. We had to close it immediately," he said. Devaraj, owner of a tea stall near the factory said, "When workers come to have tea here, they smell weird. We just cannot bear the smell."

Ashwath, another resident of Konasandra, said that waste from the three chemical factories – Karnataka Chemsyn Limited, Intermed and Kumar Organic – has completely destroyed the environment: "We have to buy water from outside to drink. The stench of groundwater is unbearable. We stopped using the water for more than a year now."

NBI Nagar, a resident of the area said, "We have to travel half a kilometer to get water. There is need for the government to intervene and see that the chemical waste is properly disposed. Steps have to be taken to prevent water contamination."

Meanwhile, authorities at the Forensic Laboratory in Madiwala are disappointed that the preliminary investigation report prepared by them has been ignored. Civic authorities, they say, await the results of the findings of the pollution control board.

Experts say that the pollution control board has been negligent in monitoring pollution. Environmentalist TV Ramachandra of the Energy and Wetlands Research Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, said that since waste is being dumped around lakes, the ground water too has got contaminated. Uncontrolled and illegal dumping has caused soil and ground water pollution, which is hard to reverse.

"It is now too late to decontaminate the soil; it will take several years before the soil is rejuvenated," he said. A large number of coconut groves can be seen in the area, and it is possible that the coconut water that Bangaloreans are drinking could contain traces of the pollutants too. There is no mechanism to check the coconuts available in the market, Ramachandra said.

Ramachandra added that the principle of pollute-and-pay should be strictly implemented against industries found to be releasing contaminants. This proposal had been placed for governmental approval, but that move was scuttled after lobbying from vested interests, Ramachandra said.

Renowned environmentalist AN Yellappa Reddy said that such pollution is a criminal offence. “No organisation or company can play with the lives of lakhs of people like this. The KSPCB should detect such cases and charge-sheet the owners of such firms.

While issuing the No-objection certificate (NoC), the government should ensure that companies produce a detailed on and off-site plan, which includes details of the pollutants and the manner in which they will be treated and disposed.

The NoC should be issued only after details of the quantity of pollutants generated and the chemicals used to nullify them are available. Efforts should not rest here, but should be extended to periodic inspections and strict vigilance.

Since this was lacking, the whole Anekal taluk is polluted, and it is no surprise that people staying in far off places in Bangalore are also getting affected by it after consuming polluted coconuts,” Reddy said.

—*With inputs from Bosky Khanna and Sunitha Rao R*

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