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### Implement the 'pollute and pay' principle

**Bosky Khanna** / DNA

*The decision of the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) to order the closure of nine government hospitals for failing to set up Effluent Treatment Plants (ETPs) is facing strong resistance from the government. The government feels this would affect the treatment of the poor. But environmentalists say this step should have been taken long back and that the government should have made it mandatory for hospitals and commercial establishments to set up ETPs. **Dr TV Ramachandra**, professor, Energy and Wetlands Research Group, Centre for Ecological Sciences and Centre for Sustainable Technologies, Indian Institute of Science, spoke to Bosky Khanna on the issue.*

#### **In this entire episode, who do you feel should be blamed — hospitals, KSPCB or the government?**

Firstly, this is not a sudden reaction. It is a four-year-old issue and KSPCB is taking stringent steps only now. Sometimes it becomes important to handle the situation in a strict manner and that is what the KSPCB is doing. There has been so much of negligence from the government's side. Untreated waste is still being discharged into lakes through sewerage lines. The government, regulatory agencies and hospitals are responsible for unsystematic disposal of waste and its treatment.

#### **Do you agree with the government that these hospitals should not be closed?**

No. I am surprised by the way government is looking at the entire issue. They should have taken responsibility for the situation as all nine hospitals are being run by the state. It seems like they have some vested interests. The 'pollute and pay principle' should be implemented. The government is at fault for not implementing the law strictly. It should cooperate for a cleaner environment. There should be a regulatory authority to ensure strict implementation of the anti-pollution norms.

#### **Doctors of government hospitals opine that they do not have time to treat waste as the number of patients is considerable; they also say that if setting up ETPs is mandatory, then all households should have ETPs too. Your comments.**

The rules are different for domestic and commercial establishments. We all pay tax and it is the responsibility of the municipality to treat the waste. But in case of hospitals, it is mandatory for them to have ETPs and treat the waste before discharging them. Else, it can directly affect health of the patients treated in these places.

#### **Do you think this issue will impact the upcoming BBMP elections?**

The hospital issue will directly impact people's lives. Any decision taken by the government and civic agencies in this regard will be a testimony to the thought pattern of the officials. So it will have an impact on upcoming BBMP elections.

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