

'Slum-dwellers are happy with 24X7'

Ashish Roy | TNN

Nagpur: The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) had to wait for a long time before it could clear the ambitious 24X7 water supply project on Monday. Standing committee chairman **Sandip Joshi** was all smiles after the meeting. TOI discussed various aspects of the project with him.

Q: Why are you going for private participation in 24X7 project?

A: The private operator has to be go in for minimum ₹ 565 crore capital investment of which ₹271 crore will be provided by the central and state governments under

JNNURM. In addition, it has to spend a minimum ₹713 crore on replacement of pipelines. Thus the total expenditure is around ₹1,000 crore plus cost escalation. Frankly, we don't have this kind of money. By involving the

private operator, we don't spend a penny. The technical efficiency is bound to increase. At present, it is 50%. In five years, the operator has to increase it to minimum 60% and to 75% in ten years. If the operator does not meet these lev-



els, then NMC will have to pay more raw water and electricity charges, which will be deducted from his payment.

Q: Many people feel that the 24X7 pilot project was not a success.

A: This is completely wrong. The residents of Pandhrabodi, Sanjay Nagar and other slums are very happy as they are now getting water round the clock. The losses have reduced sharply from 59% to 35% in the two years since the pilot project was implemented. The number of connections increased by 70% due to loss reduction. I agree that some people are not happy as Dharampeth zone never had a water problem. So

with bills issued as per their consumption, they are not happy. Corporators of north Nagpur and south Nagpur have demanded that the project should start in their area first. Obviously, they are impressed by the results achieved in Dharampeth zone.

Q: Then why was there so much opposition to the project, at least initially?

A: Well, The water tariff went up with implementation of the project. Many people thought that their bills had gone up because the billing was being as per actual consumption and not on average basis. Later, we demonstrated that there were leakages in

many houses, which was increasing the bills.

Q: How will the operator earn profits from the project?

A: We will supply it 250 million litres per day (MLD) at ₹7.90 per unit. The operator will have to increase the billing, which is currently at 217 MLD beyond 250 MLD. The total supply is 540 MLD, so there is lot of scope.

Q: Will people get water through tankers?

A: Yes, those facing water shortage will be open to approach NMC, which will ask the operator to send tankers. We will deduct the tanker charges from its payment.

Not all in NMC opposition oppose the project

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Nagpur: The green signal given by NMC standing committee to the 24x7 water supply project evoked mixed reactions from opposition corporators. While some opposed the project vehemently, others said they wanted the project to be implemented properly.

Leader of opposition Vikas Thakre, who belongs to Congress, said that he would oppose the project tooth and nail. "The residents of Dharampeth zone received very high water bills and there is lot of discontent among them. The project is bound to create problems for citizens in other parts of the city," he said.

However, another Congress corporator Satish Hole said that NMC did a wrong thing by choosing Dharampeth zone for the pilot project. "They should have chosen an area which does not receive ample water. The pros and cons of the project would have been more evident. Now, at least they should start it from areas like South Nagpur."

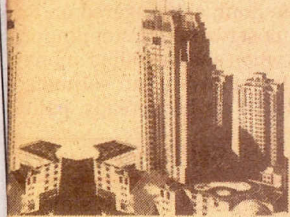
NCP party leader in NMC Vedprakash Arya said that the ruling combine was out to sell NMC to big companies. "Why can't NMC execute the project on its own on the lines of Mysore and other municipal corporations? If the company leaves midway, there will be havoc in the city. Monopoly is a bad thing as is evident from the city bus service."

Arya claimed that NMC water works department was earning profit or was not incurring losses.

However, Ashok Katle, another NCP corporator, said that the NMC house had passed the resolution to implement the project so there was no question of opposing it. "My only expectation is that NMC should provide ample water to everybody," he said.

Independent corporator Parinay Fuke, who opposed the project, said the ten zones should have been handed to different companies. Another option was to have more than one operator. "Handing over water supply of the entire city to one company will give it immense powers. It can arm twist the NMC. "Secondly, I would like to know what are parameters of success for a NMC project. I think it has to be public satisfaction. Consumers of Dharampeth zone are extremely dissatisfied. First, their problems should have been redressed. What was the hurry?" he asked.

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