

As free as water

Sorry, the idiom no longer holds

Drinking water in Srinagar would now be at a price. Although 'water tax' has been existing as a concept in Srinagar, the commodity nevertheless has generally been treated 'as free for all' in the city. But that would not be the case now.

Says E H Fazili, chief engineer, PHE, "Now people would have to pay for the water use. Mobilisation of resources is inevitable now".

The huge disparities in the drinking water supply system in Srinagar, despite the bounty of fresh water streams around the city is a reality. The drinking water needs of Srinagar city are presently catered mainly through a number of supply plants situated at Nishat, Alusteng, Rangil and Doodhganga.

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"At present the daily generating capacity of plants catering to Srinagar is about 55 million gallons, but the demand is constantly increasing because of constant increase in population", says Nazir Ahmed, a PHE official.

What has made the task of a uniform supply system difficult is the heterogeneous and haphazard growth of Srinagar city in all directions. In fact, the reason for acute drinking water scarcity in the city outskirts is the unplanned growth of colonies - a complete mismatch with the norms of the Srinagar Master Plan.

"One of the major causes of scarcity in other areas of the city is the old and worn out system which needs replacement and improvements from time to time to meet the demands", says Fazili.

Investigation shows that scarcity experienced in some other areas of the city at times is also due to their higher elevation.

The reason for water shortage in areas like Jawahar Nagar, Lal Mandi and Wazirbagh is their being at the tail end of Doodhganga and Nishat supply systems. However, PHE department is considering some solutions as well.

Says Fazili, "Various measures are on to overcome the scarcity in these areas. The revamping of Overhead Tank constructed four decades back in Jawahar Nagar area is under process which shall give relief to the area of Jawahar Nagar and Wazir Bagh to some extent."

The problem in the Batamalo area, however, is far from being easy. The area is also at the tail end of the Doodhganga and the Rangil systems and face acute scarcity during Summer months. Although government officials say that improvements in the pipelines are underway, workable solutions are hardly handy. Doodhganga system has to cater to even an enlarged outskirts area.

The scarcity in Rawalpura, Wanabal and Peerbagh areas, however, is proposed to be overcome by the construction of 2.25 MGD Plant at Doodhganga, as envisaged under Master Plan Phase II. But the fate of plant depends on the availability of funds, which till now are elusive.

Although the Down Town areas of the city are geographically close to many water plants, there is scarcity during the peak demand time in Summer in areas like Khanyar, Hazratbal, Ziarat Tengh, Shah Mohalla Rainawari, Bagwanpora, Habakadal, Khalifapora, Khanyar, Gojwara and the areas falling within the Hari Parbat Fort in Badamwari.

The people in the area pin their hopes on the re-commissioning of Pokhribal water supply scheme. The plant, with a daily capacity of 4 lack gallons, is expected to supplement the water supply position in the down town city through 1 MGD existing reservoir at Hariparbat.

Interestingly, under the scheme, water from Nagin Lake shall be lifted at Bagwanpora and treated in the existing plant at Pokhribal for lifting it to the

reservoir at Hariparbat.

That the days of depending on surface water sources are over is reflected from the fact that in areas like Bagwanpora, Amda Kadal, Lal Bazar, supply water augmentation is being done by tapping tube wells as source - from which water shall be lifted in the overhead tank for further distribution.

However, people in areas like Babapora Zoonimar, K a m a r a b a d Qamarwari, Bemina (Bilal Colony), Gousia Colony, Firdousabad, Iqbalabad, Shalibugh, Galibabad, Tantray Mohalla, Miragund, Fruit Mandi, Pathi Buddar, interior areas of Dal, Brain, Zabarwan etc. are too cynical about immediate improvements in supply position there.

Keeping in view this desperate situation, the PHE department has al-

ready taken up the scheme for augmentation of drinking water supply in Greater Srinagar City under Master Plan Phase II in a phased manner. The Master Plan Phase - II scheme envisages augmentation of 26 MGD (million gallons per day) to meet the demand.

Under the plan, the Nishat supply plant would be augmented by 4 MGD, while as Doodhganga - 2.25 MGD, Rangil - 10 MGD, Pandachowk Tangana - 10 MGD (A lift scheme from river Jhelum).

"Augmentation of 4 MGD in Nishat System has already been taken up and commissioned, while as work on augmentation of 10 MGD in the Rangil system is underway", says Fazili.

The augmentation of 2.2 MGD plant at Doodhganga is also proposed to be taken up shortly. However, for people pinning their hopes on this scheme, this Summer might not be the time to make hay. The completion of the scheme shall depend upon the availability of the financial resources, say officials at planning department.

What has aggravated the supply situation in Srinagar, according to PHE officials, is the use of "boosters" on the pipe lines and use of tap water for irrigating kitchen gardens, lawns and construction works.

A visit to old water schemes in the city makes it clear that such schemes, designed for a specific period and popu-

In QUEST

By Arjmand Hussain Talib



lation, lose service level considerably, resulting in shortages at the tail ends of systems.

"It is necessary to augment plants after the specific design period so as to have a desired service level", say Planning Department officials.

But the shortage of funds for the purpose act as a serious impediment. And that is where the PHE department in-

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tends to get tough.

"We are going for disconnections in case water users fail to pay fees. We are going for revenue collection in a big way", say PHE officials.

Although fees recovery would help the deparment in mobilising some resources for maintenance of the old systems, PHE officials have hardly anything to say when their attention is drawn to water-borne diseases in the city.

An appallingly high infant mortality rate in Srinagar due to common infections diseases like gastroenteritis and other water borne infections are directly related to unclean water supplies. A recent study having been done by a local NGO reveals that 40 percent of all illness are related to polluted water supplies, resulting into frequent outbreaks of ineffective hepatitis, gastroenteritis, poliomyelitis, typhoid and cholera.

"Boil water before drinking and pay the fees regularly" - that is the recipe of PHE officials to keep people smiling in the city.
