

The Water Bill

Shahbaz Shaik, Vivek Pamnani, Mahathi Vempati

The Beginning

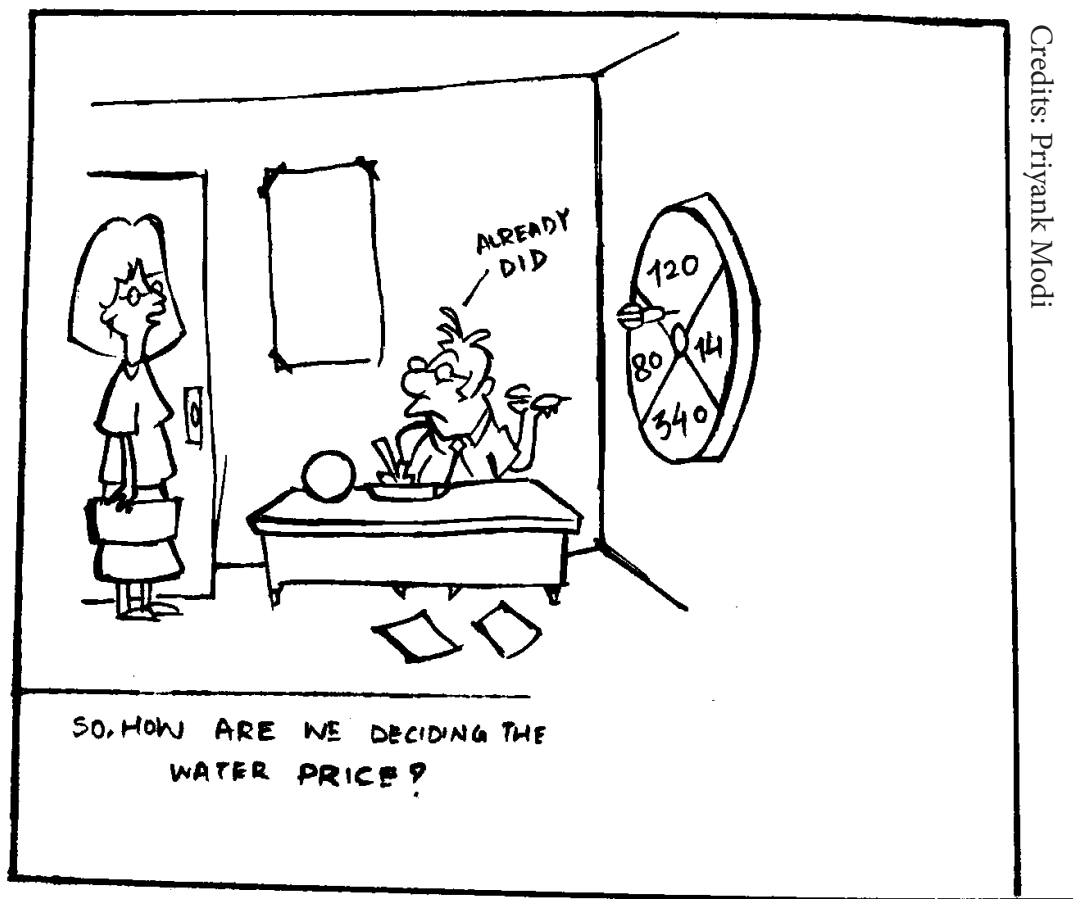
Three to four weeks before the registration of the Monsoon 2018 semester, NBH students noticed that their water bills on IMS seemed much higher than expected. The college first charges a certain amount as the water bill fees and later bills students for the water that was used in excess of the paid fee called the 'recovery' amount.

The NBH students found that their recovery amount was quite high. The students thought it could have been an error and mailed support enquiring about this. In reply they got an Excel sheet as a justification. They then started to enquire, and then realised that the water fee in NBH was significantly higher than that of OBH. Upon further enquiry, they were told nothing could be done about it, since the meter readings for both the hostels were different.

According to Minesh Mathew, one of the first few students who was involved in the enquiries, on looking for possible reasons for the increase in the water bill, an enquiry was made into the number of guests living in NBH. Although there were supposed to be only six, upon going around and checking, they realised that there were around forty unregistered guests, which could

have been a factor that contributed to the high fees. However the actual reasons were not clear. The SAC as well as the Director were not responding to mails on the matter, which instigated the students to protest. They refused to pay the recovery amount till the issue was resolved and in the meanwhile tried to look





deeper into the water bill issues and the water bill policy as a whole.

Average Consumption

According to an article by the India Environment Portal, the average water consumption in the life of a citizen living in Hyderabad would be 96.2 Litres per day. However, this figure includes water for cooking, as well as water to wash utensils. In IIIT, the water bill section of the fees includes only the water consumed at the hostels. So, theoretically, a IIIT student would use roughly about 75 litres of water per day (generously assuming they bathe everyday). This translates to around 2250 Litres being used by

a student per month. Under commercial slab, GHMC charges 100 INR / KL + 35% sewerage cess.

Amount paid by students in each hostel
An OBH student pays around 500 INR a month, a Parijaat student pays around 700 INR per month towards the water bill, and an NBH student pays an amount of around 1000 INR a month, not including the absurdly high recovery fee that was a discrepancy. Apart from this students also used to pay 100 INR per month as water surcharge.

IIIT Water Policy

[illegible]

IIIT can procure water in one of two ways. Either it buys water from the HMWSSB, the part of the GHMC that deals with water supply and treatment, or obtains it from the IIIT in-house borewells. Students are charged the same amount irrespective of how the water is procured. GHMC water undergoes proper treatment which ensures it is potable, and transports it too. Borewell water is not purified.

The ratio in which we get ground water and borewell water is not known. However, according to SAC, some of the academic buildings' drinking water areas directly get GHMC water. The rest of the GHMC water is mixed with the borewell water in an underground reservoir and sent to all the buildings. Some buildings have water treatment plants before the water is pumped up. All the drinking water points have RO purifiers, so it doesn't matter which water is pumped there.

Students paid Rs. 120 per kilo liter, based on the consumption in the meter reading of their respective hostels. This was not the case in the past, where there was a flat pricing for every student per month. The students questioned why the water was priced close to the GHMC water price when we did not completely receive GHMC water.

According to an email sent to the Parliament as a response to students' questions, the Director

stated that the 120 INR / KL that was being charged was defined irrespective of any available calculations, and that the difference will be used to plan for the future.

On being asked why the charge for borewell water was nearly as much as that for GHMC, the reasoning given was “to preserve water, to conserve it and to plan for future.” In the Director’s words:

“The decision to charge bore water at the same rate as the Manjeera water was take a couple of years ago in a conscious manner. The objective —as explained then — was to promote responsible use of water. Ground water is not forever at all and it should not be seen as “free water”. We will be doing a disservice to the future residents if we do so, resulting in depleting ground water too soon in this part of the world. We didn’t have a proper formula to “cost” this aspect and went with the rate that we pay for external water. I hope you appreciate it as it is a matter also of principle. We are working towards reducing the water requirements by recycling the grey water, having a treatment plant, etc. The wise thing will be to use the difference in today’s perceived costs to building such infrastructure. The plans are very much in progress.”

Various Costs claimed

On 19th July, the engineering department handed out a sheet as justification for the charges. However several students pointed out that this sheet had errors, some very blatant like $97 \times 10 = 582$. It was also claimed at one point that the high charge was due to the maintenance team.

Water Surcharge

IIIT charges students a certain fixed amount which is to be collected and used for future projects. These are called surcharges. Students in IIIT pay an electricity surcharge, which was used to replace tube lights with LED lights and to replace fans with more environment friendly fans. However, students also used to pay a water surcharge, despite the fact that the high water bill was being justified as something that took future projects into account.

Like the electricity surcharge, the students were unaware that an extra water surcharge is paid too.

This surcharge used to be 100 INR, but was later removed after students questioned the institute about why a surcharge existed in addition to the already overcharged water bill. The fact that money is being collected for future projects is not wrong, and in fact, should be encouraged if the projects are realistic and environment friendly. However, students were not informed about either the electricity surcharge or the water surcharge.

Status Quo

Five student representatives comprising of parliament members as well as hostel representatives had meetings with the SAC and other concerned officials regarding the discrepancies throughout the monsoon semester.

The parliament and most representatives refused to comment on the situation.

According to Minesh Mathew, one of the student representatives, both the faculty and student representatives wanted to end the ongoing and seemingly endless debates, so finally a flat price of Rs. 250 per month irrespective of hostel was decided and agreed upon. It was also agreed that a meeting would be held every year to look into the need for revising the prices. The last meeting was held in November, 2018.

In January, students of residing in Parijaat and Kadamb received an email that a refund process would be initiated for those who paid an excess amount in the water bill.

According to an update in the PHASE 1 report of the student parliament:

- a. The issue got resolved with the introduction of a new water policy. From August-2018 (Monsoon 2018), each student has to pay 250 rupees per month. This will be included as a component in the hostel rent from next semester.
- b. For Kadamb and Parijaat where high irregularities were observed, the residents of these hostels will get refunds or adjustments in the next semester's fee. The consumption for the last 2 semesters will be based on the last 3 months' usage which is around 3 KL/month/student.

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