

# The Water Bill

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## 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

IIIT can procure water in one of two ways. Either it buys water from the HMWSSB, the part

No Of Working Hours	Total Units	Rate per Unit Rs	Total Power Charge Rs	Water Pumping Charge per KLD
30	<u>97</u>	10	<u>582</u>	58.39 Per KL
60	<u>90</u>	10	<u>675</u>	72.4 Per KL
34	<u>49</u>	10	490	50.0 Per KL
5	90	10	900	90.0 Per KL
	49	10	490	5.63DKL
			TOTAL	91.00

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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