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Dalit housing beneficiaries upset over BBMP's about-turn

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Civic body release funds only to demand it back

Five beneficiaries were chosen for the scheme

Each one was to get Rs. 3 lakh in four instalments

Bangalore: A scheme meant to enable those from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to build houses on their own, avoiding interference by middlemen, has brought them only grief because of confusion over a communiqué.

This has affected five beneficiaries of the Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagara Palike's 22.75 per cent scheme for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. After releasing Rs.75,000 as first instalment for the scheme, BBMP officials are now demanding that the funds be returned, and the beneficiaries are crying foul.

On November 3, BBMP South Zone officials, including Additional Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Engineer and Executive Engineer (BTM Layout), chose five beneficiaries for the scheme — L. Annappa, Obalesh, Pedda Narasimha, Sheshadri and Thippakka. Orders were issued and the five were asked to sign an agreement. The beneficiaries duly stated they were ready to construct their own homes with grants sanctioned under the scheme by meeting 10 per cent of the construction cost and each was to get Rs. 3 lakh in four instalments. On November 16, the BBMP kept its side of the agreement by disbursing the first instalment of Rs. 75,000.

U-turn

Soon after, in an about-turn, officials claimed that the communiqué had stated that the funds were to be released to the beneficiaries only after they submitted photographic evidence of the progress of work and demanded that the five return the money. Rame Gowda, Deputy Commissioner (Welfare), claimed that the communiqué was clear. "We cannot release funds in advance as there was scope for misuse."

Contesting this, M. Venkatesh, Bangalore District Convener, Dalit Bahujan Movement, told *The Hindu* that the communiqué clearly directed the officials to first release funds and then keep track of the work progress. "Where will poor people get funds to begin construction in the first place?" he asked.

He lamented that the BBMP's interpretation of the communiqué defeated the very purpose of the scheme which was to empower Dalits to exercise housing rights.