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## **Dhobi ghat users in deep water**

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PUDUCHERRY: The Puducherry Municipality's dhobi ghat at Marapalam has been left in a state of neglect for several years. About 60 families dependent on the ghat have been facing problems of insufficient facilities, especially rooms to store clothes and a secure surrounding.

The old building at the ghat, which has about 14 rooms, is dilapidated and in need of repair. Except for two to three families, others have vacated the rooms in fear of crumbling walls, especially after the ceiling in a few rooms partly collapsed, according to washermen.

"Several dhobi families have vacated the rooms and are at present staying in rented houses. The building is very old and has developed cracks in various places. The situation turns worse during the rains when water seeps through the roof. The entire ghat faces problems of water stagnation during the rains and turns slushy," said Lakshmi, who continues to reside in a room with her daughter, owing to financial constraints.

Priya had vacated the place nearly six months ago after part of the roof collapsed. "It was a nightmare to stay here. Now, we are residing at a house at Thengaithittu on a rent of Rs.1,000, an extremely huge sum for us to pay," she said.

The new building, which was constructed recently, has about eight rooms. "We have approached the authorities concerned several times but nothing has been done citing shortage of funds. We cannot keep clothes in these damaged rooms. There is no security posted at the ghat and the place lacks sanitation," said Prabhuraman, a washerman.

Written by Administrator

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There are 20 beddings at the ghat but washermen noted that there is no place to dry clothes during the rainy season.

“ There is no compound wall for the ghat and, therefore, the surroundings are not secure for us to work,” said Lakshmi, another washerwoman who has been working here for nearly 40 years. Women also face the problem of insufficient toilet facilities, said Muthulakshmi, another worker.

Officials of the municipality said that there was a proposal to improve the facility and also modernise it at an estimate of Rs. 52 lakh. The local body has also drawn up a plan to construct temporary sheds for the families at a cost of Rs.7 lakh. “The council has approved the plan. We have to seek funds from the government,” an official said.