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## Contractors still control garbage management

The strike threatened by garbage contractors on Monday is being cited as a reminder that the city's solid waste management system is still at their mercy.

The situation on ground is contrary to the claims made by the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike. While announcing the implementation of direct payment to pourakarmikas in June 2017, the civic administration had promised to take over the entire gamut of solid waste management. But with no transport infrastructure of its own, the BBMP went back to contractors to rent out their vehicles.

The BBMP has defined pourakarmikas for direct payment as only "sweepers", keeping out garbage collectors and transporters — around 8,000 of them — from this definition.

The civic body has a deal to pay the contractors for both vehicle rent and salaries for their drivers and helpers, essentially giving back to them the entire gamut of garbage collection and transportation. "This false division of workers is a conspiracy to help contractors. All those workers who deal with solid waste are pourakarmikas," said Clifton D'Rozario of BBMP Guttige Pourakarmikara Sangha.

Bowing to the contractors' demand, the BBMP has increased the rates being paid to them. Vehicle rent and salaries for two persons per vehicle is paid as a monthly package. "A tipper was being paid Rs. 1.5 lakh and an autorickshaw Rs. 48,000, which has now been increased to Rs. 2.5 lakh and Rs. 63,000 respectively," a senior official said.

One of the major demands of contractors is immediate implementation of these new rates and payment of arrears from January 2018.

Sarfraz Khan, BBMP Joint Commissioner, SWM, said the new rates would be implemented after the model code of conduct for the Assembly election is lifted in a week's time.

## **'A vicious circle'**

The recent drive to install RFID chips to track trucks, through which the civic agency discovered that 100 non-existent trucks were being billed for years, has also hit a raw nerve. "The contractors do not want RFID chips in their trucks, GPS systems and geofencing of autorickshaws, which enables the

civic body to track these vehicles and weed out bogus billing. Whenever the civic body comes up with reforms to check bogus or inflated billing, the contractors hit back with a strike. This is a vicious circle which can be thrown out only if there is political will. But many councillors and senior politicians are hand in glove with contractors,” said N.S. Ramakanth, member, SWM Expert Committee.