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Health officials charge pollution control board with double standards

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Some private hospitals have been exempted from setting up treatment plants

All hospitals above 100 beds need to have an appropriate treatment plant

'Closing down government hospitals will affect thousands of poor patients'

Bangalore: The Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) appears to have two standards — one for government hospitals and the other for private hospitals — when it comes to treatment of liquid bio-medical waste.

Last week, based on the board's adverse report, the Lok Adalat directed it to order the closure of nine government hospitals in the city for not setting up treatment plants for bio-medical waste.

Reacting sharply, at a meeting with Medical Education Minister Ramachandre Gowda on Saturday, senior officials from the State Health Department alleged that the Pollution Control

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Board had exempted a few major private hospitals having more than 100 beds from setting up similar treatment plants. As per the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act 1974, all hospitals above 100 beds need to have an appropriate treatment plant.

Two of these “beneficiaries” are prominent corporate hospitals at Halagevaderahalli in Rajajeshwarinagar and Basaveshwaranagar, which have 121 and 102 beds respectively.

The pollution control board has allowed them to discharge both domestic effluent and liquid waste on land meant for gardening and into public drains. The consent letter also states that the authorisation is valid only for 50-bed hospitals. Officials at both hospitals were not available for comment.

State Joint Director (Medical) H.C. Ramesh asked the Minister at Saturday’s meeting: “When it is mandatory for all 100-bed hospitals to have bio-waste treatment plants and when the rule is strictly being enforced for government hospitals, why is the pollution control board exempting private hospitals?”

According to documents with *The Hindu*, the consent granted by the board for the Rajajeshwarinagar hospital is valid till June 30 and that for the Basaveshwaranagar hospital is valid till December, 2009.

These two hospitals had in their declaration to the Government for empanelment had stated that they had more than 100 beds.

“These hospitals had declared their actual bed strength to be 121 and 102 respectively in their submission to the government for empanelment. But we rejected their requisition because they had enclosed the pollution control board’s consent letter that is suitable for 50-bed hospitals,” Dr. Ramesh told *The Hindu*.

Private hospitals clamour for empanelment as this will make them eligible to treat government employees under its health insurance scheme.

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According to sources, the Health Department will point out these facts to the Lok Adalat in the next hearing scheduled for June 25. "The pollution control board should apply the same rules for government and private hospitals. It is impossible to close down government hospitals as it will affect thousands of poor patients," the sources said.