

Assam Jal Jeevan Mission Contractors Protest Over ₹12,500 Crore Unpaid Bills



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Guwahati: Amid rising concerns over the state's financial management, thousands of contractors working under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in Assam staged a massive 10-hour protest in Guwahati on Monday, demanding clearance of unpaid bills amounting to nearly ₹12,500 crore.

The demonstration, organized by the **All Assam Public Health Engineering Contractors' Association**, took place in front of the Public Health Engineering (PHE) headquarters at Hengrabari. Contractors accused both the state and central governments of negligence, alleging that while a handful of politically connected contractors were paid, nearly **8,500 to 9,000 registered local contractors remain unpaid for over 21 months.**

“We are not asking for favors, only for what is rightfully ours. We completed the works under the government’s flagship scheme, but our dues remain pending. Many of us cannot even run our households today,” said one protesting contractor, breaking down in front of reporters.

Allegations of Nepotism and Commission Protesting contractors alleged that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, ministers, and senior department officials had instructed bills to be cleared selectively in favor of contractors close to them. Many claimed that payments were made to a few firms only after hefty commissions were extracted, while the majority of contractors were left to suffer.

“Some have received bills because they paid commissions. But those of us who refused or could not pay were sidelined. This is nothing short of a conspiracy to crush local contractors,” alleged another contractor.

Contractors in Distress: The contractors warned that the situation has turned desperate. Several have taken heavy loans from banks to execute projects under JJM, but are now facing property seizures due to non-payment of EMIs. Vehicles purchased for work have been repossessed, children’s education disrupted, and medical expenses remain unmet.

Tragically, at least **two JJM contractors have already died by suicide**, unable to cope with the financial stress. “Today, even patients with kidney disease are sitting in protest because they cannot afford medicines,” an emotional protester said.

Protest Demands: The association, in its memorandum submitted to the Chief Minister and the department’s Chief Engineer, demanded: **Immediate release of all pending bills under JJM, Refund of GST amounts deducted from contractors, Withdrawal of the new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for project execution, Equal treatment for all registered contractors, without favoritism.**

A Brewing Crisis: Contractors highlighted that the Jal Jeevan Mission is a 90:10 funding scheme between the Centre and the state government, and therefore funds are already sanctioned. They alleged that despite the government’s announcement in October 2024 to release partial payments, not a single rupee has been disbursed to date.

Currently, contractors claim that bills worth **₹4,500 crore are already approved and ready for release**, while another **₹7,500 crore remains pending**. “If the government clears the approved bills alone, thousands of us will get relief. But instead, we are being pushed to the brink of bankruptcy,” said the contractors.

Call for Justice: The protest site echoed with slogans such as ***“Stop injustice against contractors”*** and ***“Clear Jal Jeevan Mission bills now”***. Many stressed that the movement is not against the government but for survival.

“We are sons of the soil. We worked day and night to implement the mission. Is development possible without contractors? The government must answer whether we are not equal partners in building Assam’s future,” the protesters said, adding a final plea: *“Let us at least survive.”*

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