

# Cellphone towers terrify citizens

People lodge complaints at the GHMC over the danger posed by them

M. ROUSHAN ALI | HYDERABAD

**M**ore than 5,000 cellphone towers have been erected atop private buildings in Greater Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts without permission. Nobody has any idea whether these towers have adequate structural stability or whether they will collapse all of a sudden. These towers belong to Airtel, Hutch, Tata Indicom, Reliance and Idea among others.

The complaints lodged with the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation focus on the danger posed by the towers. Citizens want civic officials to examine the towers and remove the unstable ones. However, the GHMC neither has data on the number of towers nor on their structural stability. It has failed to remove or demolish a single tower despite the complaints.

Owners of the buildings on which the towers have been erected are making a cool Rs 20,000 to Rs 30,000 per month as rent from the service providers. But tenants in adjacent buildings and passersby are wary of the threat these towers pose. The situation has taken a serious turn with Kapra resident Ms Varalakshmi complaining to the AP High Court about a cellphone tower on her apartment building. She said GHMC officials did not obey an earlier order by the HC to inspect the tower and remove it if found to be a danger.

A contempt petition has been filed against GHMC Commissioner, Dr C.V.S.K. Sarma, for violating court orders. The GHMC Additional Commissioner (Planning), Mr K. Dhanunjaya Reddy, said two GOs issued by the government in 1998 and 2002 allowed the mobile companies to install towers without permission from the civic body. "We don't even collect tax on them," he said.

In the context of the court case, the GHMC had written to the government asking it to scrap the GOs and allow it to monitor the structural stability of the towers and tax them.



**OUTSY LADY:** Varalakshmi approached the HC when GHMC officials did not inspect the tower on her building

## '10-tonne tower caused cracks in 5 floors'

**C**ivic issues dog every city dweller but in today's indifferent times, very few people actually do something about it. Thankfully, Varalakshmi and her husband Ravinder Reddy, residents of Kapra, are different. They didn't stay mum while the illegal tower was making money for the builder of their apartments, putting the residents' lives at risk.

Varalakshmi says, "The 10-tonne tower had caused cracks in the five floors of the building. We had to do something about this and ensure it is removed from the building terrace. The GHMC engineers inspected the building and submitted an interim report saying two pillars in the main frame of the building were weak."

It was not an easy ride but the duo did not give up. Ravinder says, "We filed so many complaints and the Kapra municipality also filed a notice against the builder and Reliance Communications but no action was taken. No one cared. So we decided to carry the petition forward to the High Court. Now we can breathe in peace as the tower is in the process of being dismantled and removed as per the judge's verdict."

Thanks to Varalakshmi and her husband's determination, the court has passed an order that now all the towers in the city be probed.

Varalakshmi says, "Towers perched on residential buildings will be checked for the imminent danger it poses to residents and also to investigate into the illegal terrace rights that are being given to service providers by builders."