

PIC: NISHANT RATNAKAR



A BOND TO SWIM

ishnaraj Kunja said, "The swimming pool is not designed to cater to the needs of physically challenged. We want to safeguard ourselves if anything were to happen to him. He says he uses life jackets, but what if he accidentally slips into the pool? If he wants to use the pool, it is his risk."

"He should not blame us. Residents have to secure themselves. We are asking only handicapped people to sign the bond. Besides, Robert is a tenant and not even an owner of the house in Himagiri Meadows. We do not want to victimise him. A simple bond removing the burden of any re-

sponsibility and a medical certificate from any doctor is sufficient for us. He is free to use the pool later. Besides, he can go to any other housing society he wishes to if he is not agreeable to the conditions."

Dejected over the attitude of the housing society members, Robert has made up his mind to leave the society if the problem persists.

"I came here because of the facilities that were present here. I will leave this place if I don't get the very facilities I came here for. However, I want this incident to be highlighted since I don't want others to go through the same."

BLATANTLY ILLEGAL

Lawyers working in the field of human rights think say this is a gross human rights violation. Human Rights Law Network lawyer Sheela Ramanathan said, "This is an absolutely discriminatory practice. It is the responsibility of the housing society to ensure his safety. They should not in any way ask him to sign an indemnity bond. It is downright illegal. It is

against all laws - Indian and international." The disability commission has already sent a letter to the Himagiri Meadows housing society for a hearing. Assistant Commissioner for Disabilities Afsha Begum said, "We have received the complaint sent by Robert George. We have written to the housing society and asked them to come for a hearing on Feb 6."

SOME PARALYMPIC SWIMMING CHAMPIONS

● **Mayumi Narita**, a quadriplegic from Japan, won 7 golds and a bronze in the Sydney Paralympics

● **Izhak Mamistvalov** from Israel and **Jim Anderson** from Great Britain won gold medals at the Sydney Paralympics as well.

FROM PAGE 1

The society has demanded three documents from Robert:

- An indemnity bond signed by Robert claiming that he alone is responsible for any eventuality as a result of his using the pool.
- Secondly, an indemnity bond signed by the house owner that he will not hold Himagiri Meadows responsible in case of any unfortunate incident occurring to Robert as a result of using the swimming pool.
- A medical certificate from a doctor certifying that Robert is medically fit to use the swimming pool at Himagiri Meadows.

According to the Director and Chief of Orthopedics, HOSMAT Hospital, Dr Thomas Chandy, swimming has immense therapeutic benefits for quadriplegics and people with motor disabilities.

"It is useful for them in several ways. The blood circulation improves and they get a feeling of well being. Psychologically it boosts them immensely since they are not used to such free movement otherwise. Water is a more gentle medium for them." Robert is firm on not signing the indemnity bond. "I refuse to sign. If I sign it, I think everyone living in the society has to sign the bond. Why should it be me alone?"

According to Robert, his landlord has been immensely supportive to him.

Robert said, "I am independent in so many ways. I even drive to Hyderabad all by myself. Everywhere I go, I receive help or appreciation. Why do they think I can't take care of myself when I swim?"

Robert's driving skills are as good as any motorist's. He even drove this reporter around for several kilometres in a four-wheeler specially modified for him and seemed completely unfazed by the heavy traffic.

An IT consultant Ravi Shankar said, "Robert has been using the pool even before the authorities asked him not to. It doesn't make any sense why they feel the pool is unsafe for him all of a sudden. He needs to swim for better motor capabilities. He's also told me that he takes necessary precautions while swimming."

President of the Himagiri Meadows housing society Kr-

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