

Land-grabbers target elderly in Chennai

A Selvaraj, TNN | Apr 27, 2011, 03.50am IST

CHENNAI: Lonely senior citizens have become the target of land sharks who enjoy the support of politicians.

Police say they are receiving an increasing number of complaints from elderly couples living in independent houses on the East Coast Road and in Besant Nagar. The senior citizens say gangs have been threatening them to sell their land for a flat and a few lakhs in cash.

The latest victims are 65-year-old Pranathi and her 70-year-old husband Venkatachalam (names changed). The couple lives in a bungalow close to Elliots Beach. A few weeks ago, 30 people wielding iron rods barged into their house. "They said we should turn our property over to them as they want to build a multi-storeyed commercial-cum-residential complex," Venkatachalam said. The couple refused as it is their ancestral property. "But I don't know how long we can resist. They were very frightening," said Pranathi. The couple lives alone as their two sons live abroad.

Venkatachalam's friend V Chandrasekar, a visiting professor at Anna University, said, "This is not the first time elderly couples have been targeted in the area. Many builders are hand-in-glove with local thugs and politicians. A few police personnel too, who are bribed by the builders, threaten senior citizens into selling their property."

A police officer said that land sharks were active since land prices in Besant Nagar had soared to more than Rs 1 crore a ground.