

**EXCRETA MATTERS**

Real medicine we know is prevention. Ironically we're all so busy, heroically locking the stable gates after the horses have fled, we've no time for such mundane stuff. So, the results of the survey of 71 cities "Excreta Matters", recently published by the Centre for Science and Environment, of where our drinking water comes from and where our sewage goes reads like a horror story. About 82% of all municipal water supply comes from surface water resources and the rest from ground water. In 11 of the cities the dependence is almost entirely on ground water. It is also shocking that no one really knows how much ground water is being extracted.

It is commonly assumed that ground water is safe since it undergoes various physical, chemical and biological processes as it travels through the soil. Unfortunately as cities have grown under the weight of an ever expanding populace, ground water has become heavily contaminated with microorganisms, nitrates, heavy metals and pesticides. The villain of the story is lack of proper sewerage. 78% of sewerage was shown to seep back into the ground as raw sewage overflow, septic tanks, leaking sewer lines, land application of sludge and partially treated waste water.

80% of the water used in households, industries and institutions are discharged back into rivers contaminating them with toxic wastes and converting them into drains. It is an eye opener that the Najafgarh 'Nullah' in Delhi, the Buddha 'Nullah' in Ludhiana and the Mithi 'drain' in Mumbai were all rivers in a bygone era. Filthy water cannot be washed but should we stand as mute spectators as our cities drown in their own excreta? (*The Hindu 6 May 2012*).

**SHIP-SHAPE EARS**

While developing underwater weapons, torpedoes, mines, decoys and targets is the *raison d'être* of the Naval Science and Technological Laboratory (NSTL) in Vishakapatnam, in its new avatar it has produced the country's first indigenous cochlear implant. Six years ago, it struck President Abdul Kalam that in our country where there are almost 1.2 million people with severe hearing disability the imported cochlear implant was exorbitantly costly. So he suggested that the NSTL, which has great experience in underwater acoustics, work on developing a

cheaper cochlear implant for patients. Dr Bhujanga Rao collaborated with scientists from Bangalore, Advanced Numerical Research and Analysis Group (Hyderabad), and Andhra University, Vishakhapatnam, to develop the device which will cost mere 1 lakh. It will be available for clinical trials in 4 months and then become commercially available (*The Hindu 19 May 2012*).

**PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL OFFENCES**

Both Houses of Parliament have passed a new law – The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012. For the first time; a law has been passed to address the issue of sexual offences against children. It provides protection to all children under the age of 18 years from the offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography. It provides for stringent punishments ranging from simple to rigorous imprisonment of varying periods as well as a fine. An offence is treated as "aggravated" when committed by a person in a position of trust or authority of child such as a member of security forces, police officer, public servant, etc.

The act provides for establishment of special courts and child friendly procedures for reporting, recording of evidence, investigation and trial of offences. These include: recording the statement of the child at the residence of the child or at the place of his choice, preferably by a ununiformed woman police officer. No child can be detained in the police station in the night for any reason. The Act also makes provision for assistance of an interpreter, special educator or an expert as per the need of the child. The medical examination of the child must be conducted in the presence of the parent of the child or any other person in whom the child has trust or confidence and in case the victim is a girl child, the medical examination shall be conducted by a woman doctor. There must be frequent breaks for the child during trial and the child must not be called repeatedly to testify. There will be no aggressive questioning or character assassination of the child and an in-camera trial of cases is compulsory. How incomplete is man's evolution that children need protection from adult bestiality (*The Hindu 26 May 2012*).

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