

Rivers facing heavy pollution: CSE

Heavy toxic metals such as lead, iron, nickel present at alarming levels, says NGO

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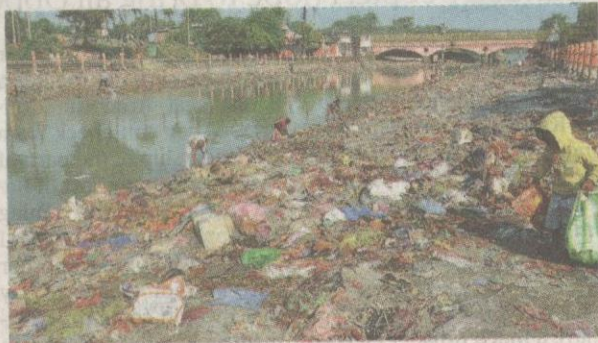
Three of every four river monitoring stations in India posted alarming levels of heavy toxic metals such as lead, iron, nickel, cadmium, arsenic, chromium and copper.

In about a fourth of the stations, which are spread across 117 rivers and tributaries, high levels of two or more toxic metals were reported.

Of the 33 monitoring stations in the Ganga, 10 had high levels of contaminants. The river, which is the focus of the Centre's Namami Gange mission, has high levels of lead, iron, nickel, cadmium and arsenic, according to the State of Environment Report, 2022 from the environmental NGO, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

The report is an annual compendium of environment-development data and is derived from public sources.

India has 764 river quality monitoring stations across



High pollution: Of the 33 monitoring stations on the Ganga, 10 had high levels of contaminants. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

28 States. Of these, the Central Water Commission tested water samples from 688 stations for heavy metals between August 2018 and December 2020.

Of the 588 water quality stations monitored for pollution, total coliform and biochemical oxygen demand was high in 239 and 88 stations across 21 States – an indicator of poor wastewater treatment from industry, agriculture and domestic households.

India dumps 72% of its sewage without treatment. Ten States do not treat their

sewage at all, as per the Central Pollution Control Board.

Coastline erosion

Over a third of India's coastline that is spread across 6,907 km saw some degree of erosion between 1990 and 2018. West Bengal is the worst hit with over 60% of its shoreline under erosion.

The reasons for coastal erosion include increase in frequency of cyclones and sea level rise and activities such as construction of harbours, beach mining and building of dams.

While the global average

of the Ocean Health Index, a measure that looks at how sustainably humans are exploiting ocean resources, has improved between 2012 and 2021, India's score in the index has declined over the same period, the CSE report underlines. India's total forest cover has registered a little over a 0.5% increase between 2017 and 2021 though most of the increase has taken place in the open forest category, which includes commercial plantations. This has happened at the cost of moderately dense forest, which is normally the area closest to human habitations. At the same time, very dense forests, which absorb maximum carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, occupy just 3% of total forest cover.

India has a forest cover of 77.53 million hectares. But recorded forests – the area under the forest department – are only 51.66 million. This gap of 25.87 million hectares – a size bigger than U.P. – remains unaccounted, the organisation noted.