

House panel slams govt arsenic apathy

7cr Affected In 6 States, Says Report

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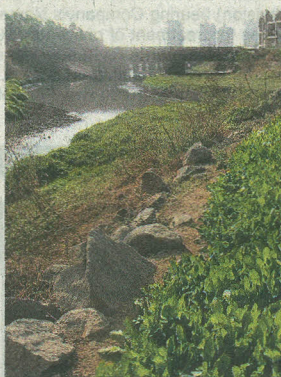
New Delhi: The parliamentary estimates committee headed by BJP MP Murlu Manohar Joshi, in its first report tabled on Thursday, on arsenic in groundwater, has criticized the Centre for "neglecting" the serious issue that impacts at least 7 crore people across six states, according to CSIR estimates (data from different ministries and departments on the subject varies widely, the committee found).

The panel has recommended that the Centre take up the issue on war footing through a national task force that can work on mission-mode from collating data to taking remedial measures to providing for health care to affected people.

The committee has suggested that the issue be dealt with at the central level, instead of asking states alone to tackle the problem. Joshi said, "To say water is a state issue is no logic, given the scale of the problem, the Centre cannot escape its responsibility to provide safe drinking water for 7 crore people, which is their fundamental right." He was speaking at a press conference after the report was tabled.

The report has recom-

POISON IN WATER



Number of arsenic affected habitations which are yet to be provided safe drinking water

*As on 1st April 2014

S.No. State	Arsenic-affected habitations
Bihar	357
Karnataka	12
Punjab	1
Uttar Pradesh*	73
West Bengal	1124
Assam	424

*(Data under reconciliation)

mended that a national task force be set up on a time-bound basis that will work on mission mode on the issue that affects people, plants, animals and all else around it. The committee has also recommended for a central fund allocation for the purpose. At a press conference, Joshi said, the Centre cannot escape its responsibility to provide safe, potable water to 7 crore Indians which is their fundamental right.

The report says, "...only after the matter has been taken up by the (Estimates) committee, a Core Committee headed by the director, National Institute of Hydrology has recommended in its report submitted on October 15, 2014, that each affected states should have an Arsenic Task Force spearheaded by the model National Arsenic Mission Task Force at the central level. The Committee found it intriguing as to why all the ministries and departments of the govern-

ment of India remained oblivious of the said Core Committee while deposing before the Estimates Committee."

The report further said "the Committee believes it is callous negligence on part of the government that they had not taken any action in this regard and urged the government to ensure functioning of the Core Committee on war footing." The estimates committee has asked for the results of the action taken to be submitted within three months.

The parliamentary panel recommended scrapping of "relaxed" permissible limit for arsenic in drinking water and said the WHO recommended norms should be complied with. The committee found that the WHO standard was "relaxed" merely due to abundance of arsenic in ground water and lack of alternative source of water.

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