

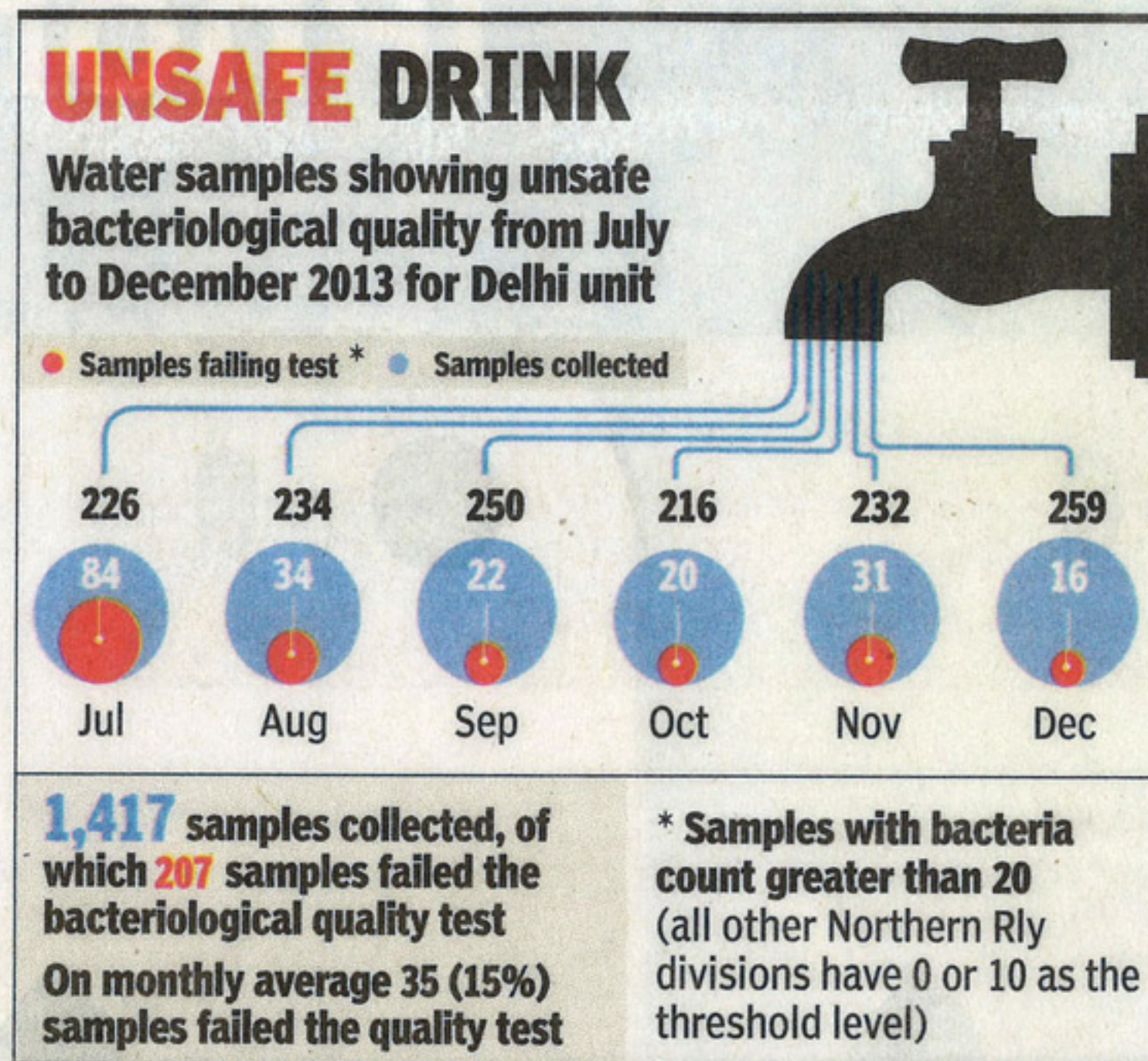
# 'Rly station water full of bacteria'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** About seven lakh passengers at Delhi's railway stations may be exposed to a serious health risk.

The reports and letters submitted by chief engineer Alok Verma to Northern Railway's general manager show the quality of water samples collected between July and December 2013 from all the stations are alarming. In his letter, Verma observes "a complete disregard of guidelines and instructions" issued a year ago. He expresses serious doubt over the suitability of chlorination plants at Delhi and Ferozpur divisions.

Verma was effectively transferred out of the railway board from Friday. The railway officials say he is not being punished for highlighting the issue; his transfer orders were issued in December last year. Sources, however, said Verma wrote his first letter to top railway officials in November, drawing attention to the health hazard. "The underlying causes for the state of water quality on this railway



are rampant irregularities and malpractices in awarding contracts for acquisition of chlorination plants, and in operation and maintenance of plants," says Verma. The letter was written to the GM, V K Gupta, on February 14, 2014.

He adds that the inspections (carried out by his officials) have also provided clinching evidence that the

technical specifications were meant to suit the plants made by these companies. The report, compiled by the medical department of the railway, finds 37% contaminated samples in Delhi. The method of testing water is a bit skewed. For Delhi division, a sample is considered contaminated if the bacteria count exceeds 20. But, Indian Standard Code

doesn't permit coli-form bacteria at all. So, the actual percentage of contamination, if the findings are correct, would be significantly higher.

The railway says it is analysing the accuracy of the tests and is conducting its own tests. Northern Railway issued a figure compiled by the medical department only for New Delhi railway station, which showed over 93% samples as unfit, while another figure compiled by its engineering department, in charge of water supply, showed 90% of samples from July last year to February were fit.

"The department chlorinates the water scientifically. Exhaustive tests are done thrice a day at three to seven locations from each source to ensure a minimum residual chlorine of 0.2ppm," said spokesman Neeraj Sharma. On the reports filed by the chief engineer, he said, "We are analysing the facts and will soon be able to comment." The Delhi division uses 3 crore litres of water every day at the washing lines, stations, hospitals and colonies.