

# '80% of sewage water enters rivers untreated'

**New Delhi:** Is urban India drowning in its own excreta? Nearly 80% of the sewage generated in India flows untreated into its rivers, lakes and ponds, turning the water sources too polluted to use. The end result: groundwater in almost the entire country has nitrate levels higher than the prescribed levels—a result of sewage leaching into India's groundwater aquifers.

These grave figures were revealed at a meeting of experts on sewage and water issues organized by the Centre for Science and Environment as part of the 'Anil Agarwal Dialogues' series.

Speaking at the confer-

ence, vice-president Hamid Ansari said, "Indian cities produce nearly 40,000 million litres of sewage per day, enough to irrigate 9 million hectares and barely 20% of this is treated." He said the untreated waste water was seeping into water sources, "thereby creating a ticking health bomb amongst our people".

Almost half of the urban population still depends upon groundwater sources for drinking, cooking and bathing which puts them at direct risk from the polluted water, Sunita Narain, director general of CSE, said.

The lack of focus on water-sewage systems has led to a

state where no city in the country has a sewage system that covers the entire population. Only four cities—Pune, Chennai, Surat and Gurgaon—claim to connect at least 70% of the population through a network of closed drains.

Almost 40% of the sewage treatment capacity of the country exists in just two cities—Delhi and Mumbai. Class I and II towns—expected to grow and absorb most of the migration in the coming years—are faring the worst. Untreated sewage flowing into water bodies has almost doubled from around 12,000 million litres a day to 24,000 million litres a day in Class I and II towns. TNN