

# Parts of Raj, Malwa drinking poison?

## Sample Of Nullah Opening Into Satluj Tests Positive For High Uranium Content: German Lab

I P Singh | TNN

**Faridkot:** In the wake of discovery of high level of uranium and other heavy metals in hair samples of 80% of 149 neurologically-disabled children, samples of five children from worst-affected village of Teja Rohela, near Fazilka — with maximum density of congenitally mentally and physically challenged children — have been sent to Microtarce Mineral Lab Germany by the Baba Farid Centre for Special Children, Faridkot. Experts say that the results from the village would be more alarming.

While high concentration of uranium is attributed to use of depleted uranium in the Afghan war by US, the problem appears to be due to continuing of release of effluents in natural water channels, something which the government machinery has failed to check. The report from Germany on water samples from Budha Nullah has revealed heavy metal content as quite high and the presence of uranium one-and-a-half times more than the reference range.

"Toxicity of single element may not be that harmful, but when heavy metals are coupled with uranium, the toxic effect increases manifold," said Dr Amar Singh Azad, a paediatrician working on neurological disorders in children at Baba Farid Centre at Faridkot. Budha Nullah and Chitti Bein carry industrial waste into river Sutlej; its waters are used by the people in Malwa and parts of Rajasthan.

The report from German laboratory has revealed that if chromium was present over 50 times the reference range, aluminium and iron content was 20 and 60 times higher than the set parameters. The samples from Budha Nullah also have

high concentration of silver, manganese, nickel and lead.

In Teja Rohella, over 100 children are mentally and physically challenged. And, going by the symptoms in these children, the results of samples from here are expected to be more alarming. While three of the children are mentally retarded, one is suspected to have motor neuron disease and another suffers from severe allergy of skin and eyes. Two samples of groundwater from hand pumps of the village, used by its residents, have also been sent.

"We expect the results can be more alarming," said Dr Azad and Pritpal Singh, president of the centre. They added that because the 149 children included in the study earlier

were from different parts of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan, more studies should be conducted by the government.

Another alarming factor from the 2009 study is that uranium has entered the food chain and its concentration has gone beyond safe limits. Published in Indian Journal of Physics in August 2009, the study by Mukesh Kumar, Sangeeta Prasher and Surinder Singh from department on uranium analysis collected from Bathinda analysed uranium content in mustard seeds, wheat and milk samples and found that it would pose significant health hazard.

The study published in IJP has found that the measured values of the uranium content were found to vary from 0.38 mBq/g in mustard seeds to 4.60 mBq/g in wheat. In case of milk, the uranium content was found to vary between 28.57 to 213.36 mBq/g. This translates into a daily dietary intake of 0.90 Bq/day.



FUTURE IN DANGER

## No 'normal' kids in this Punjab belt

Dinesh K Sharma | TNN

**Ferozepur:** The Malwa region of Punjab, once referred to as 'Makheon meetha Malwa' (sweeter than honey) for its rich agricultural produce and cotton farming, is today battling environment-related health problems, including a noticeable rise in neurological diseases, cancer cases, kidney ailments and infertility as a result of multiple environmental toxicity.

Twelve-year-old Raj (name changed) and his younger brother Suraj (name changed) of Khubban village of Abohar sub-division, have been suffering from neurological disorders since birth. A high concentration of heavy metals and radioactive substances found present in their bodies during medical tests in international laboratories has given a strong

indication that they could die any time as toxicity has drastically reduced their life spans. Six-year-old Meet Sheru of village Wan in Ferozepur is like any other child of his age, except for grey hair, a sign of premature aging.

But, he is not alone in this agony as about 12 other kids in the area are suffering premature aging. During a visit to number of villages including Teja Rohila, Dona Nanka, Khubban and Wan, it was observed that after cancer now neurological disorders, arthritis and skeletal fluorosis are fast becoming major health problems in Malwa region.

Villagers in Teja Rohila and Dona Nanka have large number of people with stunted growth. Most of these show a remarkable lack of development in height, weight and physical structure.