

NOTE

## Of Humans and Frogs Xavier Dias writes :

To those who think that they are not affected by environmental pollution often brush aside environmentalists' claims as 'phantom claims of jollawallas'. In the early 90's an IB person from Jamshedpur visited this writer's office in Chaibase. He wanted to know why people were opposing uranium mining in Singhbhum. After explaining to him in great detail about radioactive pollution he remained unconvinced and was unable to comprehend what was told. Then he was told about one of recent findings which were not at that time public as publicity of it would affect the social image of the people living in and around the Jadugora uranium mines.

Findings were really horrifying. Males after reaching normal puberty were experiencing sex changes. Shrinking of their penises and slight enlargement of their breast. He still did not care to understand. Then he was told that these deformities need not be contained within Adivasi communities but all those coming within the radius of radioactive pollution from Jadugora which included Jamshedpur. He jumped up and looked at the narrator for a second and got very restless after that. Nervous he said on leaving "I am going to write this in my report". It is not known what he wrote in his secret report and how the Intelligence Branch (IB) handled it.

That attention one gets not only when one gets hit below the belt but also when it threatens one's own blood.

Five years ago a study in Britain showed that the burning of plastics releases chemicals in the air that reduces the sperm count in men. Not much attention was given to it but surveys show that the sperm count in men in Britain is falling.

A report in the *New York Times* in June, 2009, by one Nicholas D Kristof is simply bone-chilling :

“Frogs, salamanders and other amphibians began to sprout extra legs. In heavily polluted Lake Apopka, one of the largest lakes in Florida, male alligators developed stunted genitals.

In the Potomac watershed near Washington, male smallmouth bass have rapidly transformed into “intersex fish” that display female characteristics. This was discovered only in 2003, but the latest survey found that more than 80 percent of the male smallmouth bass in the Potomac are producing eggs.

Now scientists are connecting the dots with evidence of increasing abnormalities among humans, particularly large increases in numbers of genital deformities among newborn boys. For example, up to 7 percent of boys are now born with undescended testicles, although this often self-corrects over time. And up to 1 percent of boys in the United States are now born with hypospadias, in which the urethra exits the penis improperly, such as at the base rather than the tip.

Apprehension is growing among many scientists that the cause of all this may be a class of chemicals called endocrine disruptors. They are very widely used in agriculture, industry and consumer products. Some also enter the water supply when estrogens in human urine—compounded when a woman is on the pill—pass through sewage systems and then through water treatment plants...”

Skeptics should realise that they and their families are very much within the dangerline as millions in India are suffering from chemical pollution. Climate change may seem remote. Sex change will not. □□□