

NEWS WRAP

AGD

CHANGING RAINFALL, LACK of systems to recharge aquifers, and rising demand from agriculture, industry and growing population are fast depleting India's ground water sources. Ground water in India is full of impurities. The total dissolved solids content in the water is 1850 milligrams per litre, which is far above the World Health Organization's acceptable level of 500. About 17% of Indians lack safe drinking water. Tens of millions of people, out of India's population of 1.2 billion, lack access to clean water. The dirty water from village handpumps causes stomach pains, coughs and aches. 58% of India's population have no access to hygienic toilets. Sewage and waste disposal systems are crude and non-existent in rural India. Water from wells and surface sources is easily contaminated with toxics, including arsenic and fluoride. In recent times, community water plants run by NGOs and village governments, have sprung up in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana. Panchayats provide land for the water centre, as well as electricity and access to water supplies, like wells. As power cuts are frequent, the plants cannot be relied on to operate continuously.

ILLEGAL COAL MINING

It has been alleged by Assam and Coal India that "unscrupulous elements" are illegally mining coal in Arunachal Pradesh, and stealing from Coal India's leasehold areas in Assam. Miscreants steal coal from leasehold areas, mines and depots of Coal India in Assam. The stolen coal is transported to Arunachal Pradesh, where it is surreptitiously seized and auctioned, for further transport and sale to different parts of India. In Arunachal's Changland district, there is collusion of Arunachal's mining department authorities, through seizure and auction. Taking advantage of Arunachal's mining rules, three to four rakes of coal "illegally" extracted and stolen from Coal India leasehold areas are being consigned to other states, by some traders, almost everyday. Arunachal Pradesh took back Coal India's leasehold mining areas in Namchik coalfields, about ten years ago. Even though rules permit Arunachal to mine coal on its own, it can only use the mined coal for captive projects, and not sell outside the state. Coal from Arunachal Pradesh is sold at Rs 7500 per metric ton, but the state government gets only Rs 500 per ton as royalty. There is illegal mining also in Jirampur (Tirap district).

BABY DELIVERIES

While delivering at home during 2010, less than two in ten women in India, received medical attention by a qualified professional in 2010. 10.8% women in urban India received medical attention, while delivering at home, compared to 16.2% in rural India. "Untrained functionaries" attended nearly 1 in 4 births, i.e. 25% deliveries, which varies as high as 53.3% (Jharkhand) to as low as 0.2% (Kerala). More women, almost double, delivered in government hospitals (41%), as against private hospitals (19.4%).

PORT PROJECTS LANGUISHING

An ambitious port project, the Rs 6700 crore fourth container terminal at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (Navi Mumbai) awarded to a consortium, led by Port of Singapore Authority, is continuing without progress, as the company has refused to pay stamp duty of Rs 50 crore. There are government plans under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) port projects, to award in 2012, six riverine jetties, with a capacity of 4.5 million tons each, at a cost of Rs 300 crore. At the Paradip Port Trust, the construction of a new coal terminal is in the doldrums, since various clearances are yet to be secured. The conversion of berth eight into a container terminal at Tuticorin, and the construction of an oil jetty at Haldia (Kolkata Port Trust) are awaiting security clearances. The Union shipping ministry plans to increase India's port capacity to three billion tons, would involve an investment of Rs 3 lac crore, by 2020. Two more ports are expected, one of which will be in Andhra Pradesh.

ORGAN DONATION IN CHINA

China's organ transplant system has for years relied on prisoners and organ traffickers to serve those in need of transplants. The Chinese authorities are now phasing out organ harvesting of death-row inmates, and overhaul the transplant system. There are plans to abolish the practice of prisoner organ donation, and create a national organ-donation system. An estimated 65% of China's organ donations come from prisoners. Traditional beliefs and distrust of the medical system have caused voluntary donations to be rare in China. 1.5 million people in China require organ transplants annually, while only 10,000 receive them. There is an organs black market. The infection rates for prisoners' organs are typically high, which leads to lower long term survival rate for Chinese with transplanted organs. The voluntary organ donation programme launched in 2010, has resulted in the donation of 540 major organs, in China's cities.

REFORMS IN MYANMAR

After the parliamentary by-election of end March 2012 in Myanmar, there is pressure on USA and the European Union to lift sanctions. Myanmar's new administration has released political prisoners and eased Internet Restrictions among other reforms. Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her allies are dominating the polls. Myanmar authorities are revamping the antiquated financial system. Besides greater central bank independence, plans include a new stock market and the introduction of debit cards. The value of Myanmar's currency, the *Kyat*, will be regulated through market interventions. It will, however, be some years, before foreign banks arrive. □□□