

West Bengal rivers are not fit even for bathing, says report

Cause for concern: A file photo of garbage floating in the Hooghly. ASHOKE CHAKRABARTY

A dip in the Ganges is, generally speaking, synonymous with the idea of purification. But that shall no longer be so in Bengal, where the river is so polluted that it is now officially unfit for bathing.

According to the latest State of Environment Report, published by the West Bengal Pollution Control Board (WBPCB), in 17 major rivers of the State, including the Ganges, the levels of coliform bacteria (found mainly in human faeces) are much higher than the permissible limit of MPN (most probable number) per 100 ml. The permissible limit as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) guideline is 500.

Data collected in 2015

“Regular monitoring reveals that the rivers are hardly fit for bathing as per the standard fixed by the Government of India,” said the report, based on the data gathered in 2015.

The report states that several stretches of the Ganges, known as Bhagirathi and Hooghly in the region (two tributaries of the Ganges), have a total coliform count (TCC) much higher than the permissible level of 500. Near Baharampore in Murshidabad district, TCC in the Ganges was 1.10 lakh in October 2015. In Dakhineswar in North 24 Paraganas district, it was 4 lakh, and at Shivpur in Howrah district, 2.80 lakh. At Garden Reach in the southwestern part of Kolkata, the TCC in the Ganges was 2.40 lakh.

The condition of the rivers in north Bengal was not much different. While TCC in the Mahananda river near Siliguri was 14,000, the Teesta recorded a TCC of 7,000 in Siliguri. The Karola river near Jalpaiguri and the Kaljani river at Alipurdar both had a TCC of 14,000 per 100 ml.

Significant increase

According to the WBPCB, compared with 2014, all the four main rivers of north Bengal recorded a significant increase in TCC, while the ones in south Bengal had TCC levels much higher than the permissible limit. These include the Damodar river at Assansol in Paschim Bardhaman district (90,000), the Barakar river at Tarapith in Birbhum district (17,000 TCC), the Kansai river in Paschim Medinipur district (17,000), and the Dwarka at Tarapith (3,400).

Anil Gautam, a faculty member at the People's Science Institute in Dehradun, said one of the reasons for such high TCC was the disposal of “untreated sewage.” However, WBPCB Chairman Kalyan Rudra said: “This was no exception. No part of the Ganga from Haridwar to Gangasagar is fit for bathing.”

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