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“Thamirabarani river crying for attention on World Environment Day”

As World Environment Day is observed with 'Ecosystem Restoration' as its theme, people have urged the State government to take adequate steps to restore the river's health.



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NO END IN SIGHT TO THE PLIGHT OF THAMIRABARANI

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THE river Thamirabarani is being polluted by discharge of untreated sewage and organic loads by the villages situated on its course. Even as World Environment Day is observed with a theme “Ecosystem Restoration” on June 5, the public appeal to the State government to take adequate steps to curb water pollution and restore its sanctity.

Over the years, the river has been much polluted by the direct discharge of sewages, domestic and solid waste by the local bodies on the bank of river Thamirabarani and its tributaries. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has notified the stretch between Pappankulam to Arumuganeri of river Thamirabarani (running over 80 kilometres) as polluted, and has classified it under Priority-V which emphasises monitoring of locations exceeding desired water quality of 3mg/l of BOD.

According to the action plan published by Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) recently, the Murappanadu village, which has a population of 1556 individuals directly discharges 54 KLD of untreated sewage generated from the village into the river near the drinking water pump house. The report says at least 44.313 MLD of sewage water including 31.91 MLD from Tirunelveli corporation is being discharged into the river Thamirabarani. The Tirunelveli corporation treats 24.2 MLD of sewage waste, the report claimed.

The TNPCB report also af-



Waste water flowing into river Thamirabarani in Thoothukudi district | EXPRESS

firms that even though 145 industries lie on either side of the river Thamirabarani in Thoothukudi district, there has been no discharge of industrial trade effluent into the river. The river has 214 industries in Tirunelveli. The 27 river water sample test conducted in 2019 had revealed that the water quality had complied with the mineral contents throughout, but seven samples with six of them from Thoothukudi failed to comply for BOD (BioChemical Demand) and DO (Dissolved Oxygen) standards. As per the Water Quality Criteria (WQC) limit for bathing, the water should be content with 5 mg/l of DO, 500 MPN/100 ml of Faecal Coliform and 3 mg/l of BOD.

“The water samples collected at Manimutharu (near road bridge), Punnakayal (near fishing harbour), Eral (backside of MSV dumping yard) did not comply for both BOD and DO, whereas Murappanadu, Srivaikuntam, Eral (Cherman temple backside) Authoor did not comply for BOD”, the report mentions.

The report pointed out that the level of BOD spikes where

the domestic sewage confluences into the river. Also, the fishing harbor activity in the confluence impacts the biological quality of the river, the report said. When the case came for hearing at the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in February this year, TNPCB reported that the local bodies along the river Thamirabarani had proposed to install Sewage Treatment Plants (STP).

“High level of BOD means the location is unfit for even taking bath,” said retired professor Dr Murugesan of MS university, adding that the reports on faecal coliform is under reported. Commenting on the TNPCB’s action plan report, Environment activist SP Muthuraman told TNIE that the BOD level of water increases at the tail end of Thoothukudi, because of discharge of sewage in the upstream main in Tirunelveli district. Speaking to TNIE, Thamirabarani Executive Engineer Annadurai said that the local bodies along the river have been urged to install Sewage Treatment Plants for recycling the waste water. It shall be discharged only after treating, he said.

THOOTHUKUDI: The Thamirabarani river continues to be polluted by the untreated sewage and organic waste from the villages on its banks. As World Environment Day is observed with 'Ecosystem Restoration' as its theme, people have urged the State government to take adequate steps to restore the river's health.

The river had been polluted by the direct discharge of sewage, domestic and solid waste by the local bodies on the banks of the Thamirabarani and its tributaries. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has notified the stretch between Pappankulam to Arumuganeri of the Thamirabarani (running over 80 kilometres) as polluted, and has classified it as Priority-V, which necessitates monitoring of locations exceeding desired water quality of 3mg/l of BOD (biochemical oxygen demand).

According to the action plan published by Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) recently, the Murappanadu village, which has a population of 1,556 individuals, directly discharges 54 kilolitres per day (KLD) of untreated sewage into the river near the drinking water pump house. The report says at least 44.313 MLD (Millions of Litre per Day) of sewage water, including 31.91 MLD from the Tirunelveli Corporation, is being discharged into the river. The Tirunelveli Corporation treats 24.2 MLD of sewage waste, the report claims.

The TNPCB report also affirms that even though 145 industries lie on either side of the river in Thoothukudi district, there has been no discharge of industrial trade effluents into the Thamirabarani. The river runs by 214 industries in Tirunelveli. In 2019, tests of 27 river water samples revealed that the mineral contents of the water met with standards throughout, but seven samples -- six from Thoothukudi -- did not meet BOD and DO (Dissolved Oxygen) standards. As per the Water Quality Criteria (WQC), to be safe for bathing, the water must have 5 mg/l of DO, less than 500 most probably number/100 ml of Fecal Coliform and 3 mg/l of BOD.

"The water samples collected at Manimutharu (near road bridge), Punnakayal (near fishing harbour), Eral (backside of MSV dumping yard) did not comply with the standards for BOD and DO, whereas Murapanadu, Srivaikuntam, Eral (Cherman temple backside) Authoor did not meet BOD standards," the report mentions. Across the course of the river, water sample collected at Punnakayal village where the river merge with the river, had reported the highest level of BOD with 18.35 mg/l, which is 6times than that of permissible level.

The report points out that the level of BOD spikes where the domestic sewage flows into the river. Also, the fishing harbor activity at Punnakayal impacts the biological quality of the river, the report says. It is pertinent to recall that a case to curtail discharge of untreated sewage into river Thamirabarani from the local bodies, is pending with South Zone of National Green Tribunal (NGT) since 2015. When the case came for hearing at the NGT in February this year, TNPCB reported that the local bodies along the river had proposed to install Sewage Treatment Plants (STP).

"High level of BOD means the location is unfit for even taking baths," says retired professor Dr Murugesan of MS University, adding that the values of faecal coliform are understated. Commenting on the TNPCB's action plan report, environment activist SP Muthuraman says that the BOD level increases at the tail end of the river at Thoothukudi, because of the discharge of untreated sewage upstream in Tirunelveli district. Thamirabarani Executive Engineer Annadurai says that the local bodies along the river have been urged to install Sewage Treatment Plants for recycling the waste water at the earliest. The sewage shall be discharged only after treating, he claims.

However, Muthuraman strongly objects to the proposals of discharging treated sewage into the river. Muthalankurichi Kamarasu, a petitioner in Madurai Bench of Madras High Court seeking direction to control sewage inflow, urged the TNPCB to conduct further inspections in Thoothukudi to ensure compliance with the Water Quality Criteria.