

Lack of water pollution policy lamented

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has pulled up the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) for the absence of a “specific water pollution policy”.

There was no inventory of water sources or identification of pollution levels, the absence of which hampers water pollution management at all levels, it said in its report on the MoEF's performance during July 2010 to February 2011, when Mr Jairam Ramesh was heading the Ministry.

Lack of planning

Noting the lack of planning to tackle pollution of rivers, lakes and groundwater and assessment of the risks to health and environment, the CAG called for strict enforcement of the related Acts as well as higher penalties. It said the Ministry had not carried out any study to probe the effect of dumping of industrial effluents by paper mills, pharma, chemical, distilleries and so on.

The National River Conservation Plan (NCRP) was also flayed for focusing on “sewage and crematoria as sources of pollution of rivers. Other kinds of pollution (like industrial pollution) were not considered which had equal, if not more, adverse effect on health and environment”, the report said.

The performance of projects under NCRP was unsatisfactory, it said. “Around 82 per cent of the projects were completed after the scheduled date of completion. Twenty-eight projects costing Rs 251.27 crore were constructed but not utilised as yet.”

Water policy

Of the 25 States, only 18 had framed a water policy, and Kerala was the only State that had a separate policy to deal with water pollution, said the report, which covered 140 projects across 24 polluted stretches of rivers, 22 lakes and 116 blocks across 25 States.

Among the several recommendations, the CAG said there was need to specifically take into account prevention and control of water pollution as well as ecological restoration of degraded water bodies, identify the sources of pollution and assess the resultant risks.

But, proper planning and implementation can only be done if there is proper data on all aspects of water pollution, and the MoEF was way behind in this aspect, the CAG report said (BusinessLine 3-1-12).