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MUMBAI: If you are a resident of Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Nashik or a few other cities, you can be certain that the water you drink and use for household purposes does not match the norms and standards set by various agencies. The culprit responsible for supplying dirty water to you is none other than the state government.

Supply of unfit water has been taking place unchecked because, since 1994, there has been a steady deterioration in the water quality of important rivers across Maharashtra. Exposing this sorry state of affairs in its latest report, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has blamed the state government and the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board (MPCB).

Water supplied by the rivers is affected since it is either not treated or effluents find their way into it. And as both the state government and MPCB took their own time about siting industrial units, rivers got even more polluted.

"The Union government's guidelines could not be enforced for 15 long years due to the inordinate delay in framing the policy," the CAG report added.

While the pollution board explained

that the policy was cleared only in July 2000, the state government did not bother to enlighten CAG about the reasons for the delay.

According to the CAG report, the official neglect affects the people who depend for their daily water supply on the Bhatsa, Ulhas, Wainganga, Krishna, Patalganga, Mutha, Pavna and Godavari rivers. The cities and towns which these rivers supply water to are Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Kalyan, Pimpri-Chinchwad, Pune, Satara, Nashik and Nagpur. In all these cities, the level of biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) in almost all the samples examined has been recorded over and above the accepted standard.

On the other hand, dissolved oxygen (DO) was below the required level in the Patalganga, Godavari, Wainganga and Mutha rivers. In addition, bacterial coliform was observed at Dhom dam in Satara district and the Krishna river. Faecal coliform beyond the prescribed limits was noticed in the Gangapur dam in Godavari river during 1994-1999, CAG said.

In Maharashtra, 21 river basins covering the entire state have been identified by the MPCB for water pollution control. "Inadequately treated domestic and indus-

trial effluents entering the water bodies are the main cause of pollution," the report said. It pointed out that of 5,503 million litres per day (MLD) of domestic effluents generated in Maharashtra, a mere 1,309 MLD was treated adequately. The remaining 4,194 MLD of waste water remained untreated till March 2000, the report stated.

Set up in 1970 as an autonomous body, the MPCB is the sole agency to protect and maintain the environment. It has been authorised to regulate the levels of pollutants by different processes through its 11 regional offices, even as the CAG has concluded that it will have to achieve much more.

Before reaching this conclusion, the CAG conducted a review to assess the extent to which water pollution was prevented or controlled in the state. The effectiveness of the measures taken for the protection of the environment, control and abatement of water pollution and improvement in the quality of water sources by MPCB were examined. In addition to the board headquarters in Mumbai, records in seven regional offices — Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Raigad district, Thane, Kalyan, Nashik and Pune — for the period 1994-1999 were checked to review the working of the board.