B B C NEWS UK EDITION

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Indian villagers crippled by fluoride

BBC correspondent in Hyderabad This is a story of a land where excess fluoride has turned

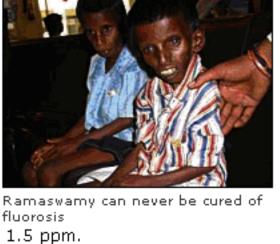
the ground water into a slow poison, crippling at least 10,000 people and leaving hundreds of thousand of others in constant misery. This is the story of Nalgonda,

Andhra Pradesh in southern India. The seriousness of the problem can be measured by the fact that the groundwater has 10

one of the poorest and most

drought-prone districts of

to 12 parts per million (ppm) of fluoride in contrast to a maximum permitted level of just 1.5 ppm. In the dust-filled hamlets and villages hardly 100 kilometres



(60 miles) from the state capital Hyderabad there are many

Shocking People with paralysing bone diseases, stooped backs, crooked

hands and legs, deformed teeth, blindness and other

The most shocking and sad image of this suffering is

living examples of the havoc caused by fluoride.

handicaps are a common sight.

Ramaswamy.

'Dreadful fate'

legislative assembly

At 18-years of age, when other youths are full of enthusiasm for life, Ramaswamy looks to be hardly five-years-old, with a

physique completely devastated by the effects of fluoride.

challenged. He cannot recognise his own name and he cannot even eat by himself.

He is so weak that he cannot walk and weighs barely 15

kilogrammes (less than 34 lbs). He is blind and mentally

"We have done all we could have done," says his father Ramalingaiah, himself a victim of fluoride in Anneparti village.

"Now it is up to the God and government to do something to relieve our sufferings," he says with misty eyes.

Komati Reddy Venkat Reddy, a FLUORIDE FACTS

our horrendous sufferings. "But the government shows no seriousness towards solving the problem". Mr Reddy represents the

opposition Congress party and

profile of the problem in March

succeeded in raising the

member of the Andhra Pradesh

representing Nalgonda district

says: "Ramaswamy is the symbol of our dreadful fate,

when he went on a hunger strike, demanding the completion of a drinking water project. Although his fast was forcibly broken he succeeded in stirring up public opinion.

He denies the allegations of inaction.

Governor's House.



 10,000 people are totally crippled Plans to bring clean water from

the river Krishna are under way

at a cost of 12 billion rupees Experts say there is no cure for

- skeletal and dental fluorosis
- His party also mounted pressure on the state's Telugu Desam Government by organising a march of fluoride victims to the

"This problem has been there for ages. The typical underground rock formation with fluoride is the root cause of

the problem. And there is no solution other than bringing

water from other areas through a pipeline," he says.

Ram Prakash Sisodia is head of the administration in Nalgonda.

Crippled Saidamma is36, but looks like a 60-year-old with grey hair and a thin body.

Local people have been demanding this for 30 years and say they want a supply of water from the River Krishna, which flows about 100 kilometres (60 miles) south-east of the area.

She is a widow and is suffering

from severe chest pains and recurring fever. Her son is crippled and her grandson was born with defective legs.

With extensive suffering, there is growing anger, frustration and disappointment. Sudhakar Reddy is handicapped late for some



make meaningless promises that water will come. But nothing has happened so far," he says angrily. Venkat Reddy says this is despite a clear ruling that if the

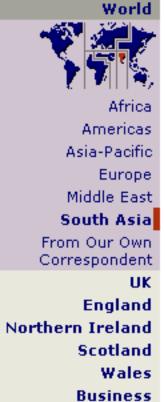
relocate the villagers. Mr Sisodia says that day is not far off. "We will start pumping water to these villages by June 2004," he says.

government is not able to supply safe drinking water, it should

Now that a definite time limit has been given, there is some hope that the region will see drinkable water one day.

who had already been crippled by an incurable disease.

But even if that water comes, it will be too late for thousands



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