

# 'Poor sanitation indices in India'

## But Govt programmes making a difference

Staff Correspondent

**BANTWAL:** India is just above Afghanistan and Pakistan in sanitation indices among developing countries in the world. Even Bangladesh is above India in this crucial social index, according to Renu Gera, programme officer (water and sanitation), the United Nations Children's Fund, Hyderabad. The child malnutrition rate of 50 per cent in India is much higher than Eritrea, an African nation, where it is only 35 per cent.

### Improvement

While these figures may disappoint Indians, there is no need for despair, she said. "Although India was once a laughing stock for other nations, various government programmes, including total sanitation campaign undertaken by the Ministry of Rural Development, aimed at ameliorating rural poverty and improving sanitary conditions, have resulted in considerable improvement in living conditions, she added.

Interacting with media persons on the sidelines of a visit by a 20-member international learning exchange team from UNICEF to Ira and Kurnad gram panchayats in the taluk on Monday, Ms. Renu

said the sanitation index of Karnataka, which was a poor two per cent when the campaign was launched in 2004, is now a healthy 38 per cent. Although this is lower than the national average of 45 per cent, it is a positive achievement, she added.

Terming this jump in the State's index as worth appreciating, she said: "The sanitation index in a 'literate' Dakshina Kannada is 90 per cent.

This is a clear indicator that when there is a right mixture of government policies and human initiative, along with resolve of a government official to implement a mandate given to him/her, one can see the programmes end up in transforming human lives, especially in rural areas for the better."

On the visit by the team, Ms. Renu said, "Most of them are health, water and sanitation officers in their respective countries, or they work as project officers with UNICEF. They will assess the success of the campaign in these gram panchayats and strive to implement a similar model back home."

The 20-member team comprises delegates from six nations — Indonesia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Djibouti, Mozambique and Sudan.