Address Sanitation Woes

What is the issue?

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- Faecal sludge management (FSM), has been recognised by the Government of India as an option of sanitation.
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- It has its own challenges which India needs to address to achieve its sanitation goal.
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What are the stages of sanitation?

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- Sanitation is intrinsically linked to health, and unless faecal waste is treated properly and disposed of safely, it will make us sick either by contaminating our sources of drinking water or getting into the food chain.
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- The full cycle of sanitation has four stages:
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1. Access to toilets
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2. Safe containment
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3. Conveyance either through the sewerage network or de-sludging trucks.
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4. Treatment and disposal.
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- The waste needs to be handled safely at each of these stages in order to gain public health benefits.

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- Sewerage refers to fully sealed underground pipes, and must not be confused with open storm water drains that are supposed to carry only rainwater.
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What is FSM?

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- Sewerage systems and sewage treatment plants (STPs) a preferred system in most western countries are not only expensive but are also complicated to maintain for India.
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- An alternative to sewerage systems is something known as on-site systems, Septic tanks and pit latrines, which are prevalent in many Indian households, fall into this category.
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- If these systems are designed, constructed and managed properly, they can be perfectly safe options.
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- Safe containment, collection and treatment is known as faecal sludge management (FSM), and is being increasingly recognised by the Government of India as a viable option.
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What are the practical challenges in FSM?

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- Emerging evidence from across the country indicates that on-site systems are not constructed properly.
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- While the designs of ‘septic’ tanks and leach pits have been set out in standards issued in government documents, houseowners and masons are often not aware of these.
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- The most severe consequence of these poorly designed pits is the potential contamination of groundwater as they are not de-sludged at regular intervals.
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- Faecal waste needs to be transported using de-sludging vehicles (and not

manually) but only some States, Tamil Nadu for example, have these vehicles.
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- There aren’t enough treatment facilities to guarantee proper treatment of the sludge.
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What are present initiatives to address this issues?

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- After the National Urban Sanitation Policy (NUSP) in 2008, a national policy on Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM) was released in 2017.
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- Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Odisha have released State-wide septage management guidelines and taken concrete steps to execute these policies.
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- States which lack de-sludging vehicles have planned to procure vehicles for their urban local bodies or encouraging private players to get into this.
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What more needs to be done?

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- Once collected, the waste needs to be treated properly to ensure that it does not land up in our lakes and rivers.
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- Raising awareness about correct design and construction practices of on-site systems is need of the hour.
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- Urban local bodies and State governments need to ensure that the larger containment systems such as community toilets and public toilets are properly constructed and managed.
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- Permission should be granted to new buildings, especially large apartment complexes only when the applicants show proper septage construction designs.
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- The safety of sanitary workers who clean tanks and pits must be ensured by enforcing occupational safety precautions and the use of personal protective

equipment as set out in the law.
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Source: The Hindu

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