

Waterways on River Ganges – Environmental Challenge & Opportunity

July, 2016



Welcome

I'd like to personally welcome all delegates. It's an exciting time for all of us as we continue to grow and adapt, remaining always adaptable, motivated and responsive to new ideas. We're meeting during a time of large nation-wide and global change. The field of law, policy and strategy research is an exciting area in which we work. We will continue to meet and bring intellectual people to come together in forums like this, to ensure IIFH remains at the top to strengthen the humanity.



The series of public lectures on contemporary national importance hosted every month and was held on July 2016 with well-known Ganga Activist Dr. Onkar Mittal and Environmentalist Dr. Hishmi Jamil Husain giving a broad overview of the proposed waterways on river Ganga and its implications both for ecology and development. A large number of Delhiites including public luminaries and enthusiasts, among others, turned up for the event braving incessant rains leading to traffic snarls in most parts of Delhi, a pointer to the popularity among Delhi's intelligentsia.

The session kicked in after chanting of mantras invoking the Holy Spirit for universal peace. As part of his introductory remarks, General NC Vij, highlighted that the survival of river Ganga is invariably linked to the survival of millions of Indians who live along its course and depend on it for their daily needs—water, energy, and agriculture, among other needs. He strongly pitched for underlining the theological and historical significance of Ganga in order to sustain ongoing various initiatives to clean up the river, a view that resonated strongly throughout the presentations that followed.

Dr. Onkar Mittal, who has been advocating strengthening urban governance for the prevention of pollution to the Ganges, set off his presentation with a visual depiction of the sacred river as she traverses through the scenic and circuitous slopes of the mighty Himalayas, her grandeur and beauty in full display. A hymn to the Ganges or best known as 'Ganga Stotam' composed by Adi Shankaracharya, glorifying many virtues of Holy Ganga, accompanied the video, which almost immediately set the stage for a somber and insightful discussion on a subject which has caught the attention of policy planners and the general public alike in recent times.

In a riveting presentation, Dr. Mittal underscored that environment and development are not contradictory but complimentary to each other. Mindless urbanization without giving a thought to ecology has resulted in Ganga being one of the most polluted rivers today. He said that the process of damaging Ganga started with the construction of Railways during the Colonial period and the process continues unabated even-today with large-scale construction of dams over the river, its water diverted for agriculture, industry et al. Significantly, he took pains to dissect the disease that Ganga is afflicted with into three parts – construction of dams and deforestation in the upper regions from Devpryag to Haridwar, minimum ecological flow and pollution in the plains from Hardwar to Varanasi, and siltation and



floods from Varansai onwards to the Ganga Sagar. While several initiatives were taken in the past to make Ganga free of pollutants as also to ensure uninterrupted flow of water, Ganga continues to remain among the most polluted rivers, its water level reduced successively. While analyzing merits and demerits of various Ganga action-plans, Dr. Mittal argued that an alternative plan of action must include, among others, restoration of the rights of the river, prioritization of solid waste management, formation of city forums for participatory planning for river protection, education of the councilors and advocacy with state governments for giving power back to the ULBs (Urban Local Bodies).

Dr. Hishmi Jamil Husain's presentation focused on the proposed waterways on Ganga, part of the Central Government's pet Ganga development project. He supported the planned waterways on Ganga largely on counts of safety, fuel-efficiency and environment friendly. Furthermore, he believed waterways to be the transport of the future. The presentation included elements of sustainability, components of waterways, and major challenges for navigation, among others. The views of the speakers found resonance in the house with members of the audience chipping in with their own comments on how to find the right balance between the demands of development and the needs to sustain ecology.

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