

Earth Day

HUNDREDS MARCH ACROSS THE CITY TO SAVE EARTH

Brij Khandelwal

Agra April 22:

Hundreds of students holding placards and banners marched through the streets in the Trans Yamuna of Agra to awaken people to the threats posed to nature and earth by "man's uncontrollable greed" and rampaging of resources.

The Earth Day rally was organised by St Andrew's College, with support from Rivers of the World Foundation, Yamuna Foundation for Blue Water

and My Clean Agra campaign. Several other smaller groups joined the campaign by cleaning up the Yamuna ghats. Because of the intense heat wave, the celebrations were not as grand as had been initially planned, said programme coordinator Brij Khandelwal, who read out a brief message from Subijoy Dutta, environmental scientist based in Washington DC and president of the Foundation.

The rallyists were led by octogenarian Ram Avtar Sharma who has been trying to recharge Agra's underground water resources through several schemes. Sharma addressed the students at the Ram Bagh (Mughal emperor Babur's Aram Bagh) which was cleaned up by the students, exhorting them to save every drop of water and trees. "If Agra people do not wake up today to save their life line Yamuna, tomorrow will be too late," Sharma warned.

At another programme at the Gayatri Public School, educationist Shivani Chaturvedi and president of Wake Up Agra, Shishir Bhagat distributed plants to give a momentum to the greening efforts.

Speakers at the Earth Day symposium organised by the Braj Mandal Heritage Conservation Society, at the Goverdhan Hotel, expressed alarm and concern over the depleting green cover and abnormal rise in temperature. "The whole of Agra region is presently enveloped in a dust cover which is dangerous for both humans and stones. The Aravali ranges have been denuded and huge gaps created by illegal mining operations which made it easier for the dusty westerlies to enter this region. We need to launch a massive afforestation



Yamuna River – Upstream of Agra

Photo: Subijoy Dutta

programme on a war footing if the heritage monuments had to survive for posterity," president of the Society Surendra Sharma said.

Earth Day is celebrated to remind people of their duties to mother nature, said Hari Dutt Sharma, editor of School Prangan weekly. "You can not go on and on rampaging and plundering resources without giving back something in return," he said.

Our water resources are getting exhausted, trees are disappearing as are forests, and concrete jungles plus changing life styles are disturbing the balance, warned Harvijay Singh Bahia who has launched a "Better Agra" drive to green the city this rainy season. "We have changed our modus operandi, learning from the failure of earlier such drives. We now wait for invitations from interested people and then go to their premises to prepare the pits with manure. By May end the ground would be ready and we hope to plant more than 10, 000 saplings with the first showers. Each tree will have a saviour identified and made responsible for its early life. We have volunteers and a huge database ready," Bahia told IANS.