

Monday, October 20, 2003

PEOPLE'S ACTION PROGRAMME  
**CAMPAIGN FOR YAMUNA CLEANLINESS LAUNCHED**

AGRA:

SOCIAL ACTIVISTS and environmentalists in Agra have launched a Yamuna Cleanliness campaign.

Dozens of workers participated in an awareness programme on Sunday offering puja at the ruins of the Corridor ghat near the Taj Mahal and pledging to continue the campaign for restoring good health and glory to the Yamuna which has already become a huge drain. The programme was jointly organised by the Sri Nathji Nishulk Jal Sewa and the Yamuna Foundation for Blue Water. Mr Bankey Lal Maheshwari of the Jal Sewa said a sustained mass movement was necessary. "Citizens should stop looking to the government for everything but initiate action on their own to stop further degradation of the river." Rajan Kishore said the city's life line had been reduced to a stinking nullah. Vinay Paliwal suggested filing criminal cases against people who dirtied the river under the provisions of the Air and Water Pollution Act.

Earlier, a symposium on pollution in Yamuna expressed concern over the failure of the state agencies to check pollution. Speakers highlighted various aspects of river pollution and identified sources responsible for the sad state of the once vibrant river along whose banks flourished the great Mughal metropolis.

Shravan Kumar said the cities upstream of Agra were the real culprits who despite clear guidelines from the Supreme Court were unloading all their wastes into the river.

Uday Kasana and Chatrapati Mishra accused the central and state pollution control boards for letting certain sections of society to pollute the river and releasing untreated sullage. The mandatory checks are not enforced as industries often grease the palms of investigating officers.

Abhishek Mehrotra wanted the River Police project given a try. The dairy owners and the dhobis should be told not to dirty the river, Jugal Bhaskar added.

Shashi Kant Upadhyaya said the real offenders were the numerous electro plating and chain making units, some of whom were using even Potassium Cyanide.

Bhakti and Tanu Sharma added there was an urgent need to launch a people's movement to restore good health to the river. The younger generation should be made aware of their responsibility to keep the river front clean. Few cities in India have such a long river front, stretching up to eight kilometres from Balkeshwar to Taj Mahal. This should be used for socio-cultural activities to attract the tourists, Divya Sharma suggested.

In past years several initiatives have been taken to clean up the river. The Rs 200 crore Yamuna Action Plan with Japanese assistance has not made any discernible change, said Shiv Pratap Singh. Rajesh Kumar on the other hand wanted tight policing to keep the offenders at bay. A large number of people use the river for defecating and dumping garbage. The Agra Nagar Nigam should build Sulabh Sauchalayas at vantage points along the river bank, demanded Rashmi and Chanchal.

The Yamuna Ghats and temples along the bank were demolished in 1976 during the emergency on orders from Sanjay Gandhi. "If people's interest in the river is to be aroused, some good ghats will have to be rebuilt and facilities provided for public bathing," GP Singh Sengar suggested.

The participants decided to start a Yamuna Shuddhikaran Abhiyan involving all sections of society. ENDS