

## Speeches

20/03/2012

### Speech delivered by Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha, Smt. Meira Kumar at the Workshop on "Water Conservation and Management – with special reference to river Ganga" at Parliament Library Building on 20 March, 2012

It is my pleasure to inaugurate the Workshop on Water Conservation and Management with Special Reference to River Ganga. The theme of this workshop has a great topical relevance as the river water pollution has reached an alarming level, which requires our immediate attention.

Water is the basis of all life. It is fundamental for human existence, ecological balance and for the very future of our planet. History is replete with examples of major civilizations across the world that have flourished on the banks of rivers such as the Indus valley Civilization, Egyptian Civilization and Mesopotamian Civilization.

Nature has bestowed India with extensive river systems. The mighty Himalayas are the source of major rivers like the Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. The Ganga is India's largest and the most sacred river that traverses about 2,525 kms from its origin in the Himalayas to its enormous fan-shaped delta in the Bay of Bengal enriching huge swathes of agricultural plains and sustaining a long procession of towns and cities. It has been a cradle of human civilization since times immemorial. People of our country have immense faith in the powers of healing and regeneration of the Ganga and depend on this great river for physical and spiritual sustenance.

The Ganga basin spanning over more than one million sq. kms. (1,060,000 sq. kms) is the largest river basin in India in terms of catchment area, constituting 26 per cent of the country's land mass and supporting about 43 per cent of its population. Its sprawling basin covers 11 states viz., Uttarakhand, U.P., M.P., Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal and Delhi[1]. Capital cities like Delhi, Kolkatta, Lucknow and Patna are located in this basin. It accounts for one-fourth of the country's water resources and is home to more than 400 million Indians. Average population density in the Ganga basin is 520 persons per square km as against 312 for the entire country. 232 class – I cities and 149 class – II cities including densely populated areas of Kanpur, Meerut, Varanasi, Agra and Allahabad are situated in the basin[2].

As India's holiest river, the Ganga has a cultural and spiritual significance which far transcends the boundaries of its basin. It is the most sacred river in the world and is deeply revered by the people of this country. It is a life-line, a symbol of purity and virtue for millions of Indians. The river plays a vital role in religious ceremonies and rituals. It is worshipped as a living goddess and people from across the country come to the historic temple towns on its banks to pray and bathe in its waters.

Despite this iconic status and religious heritage, it is extremely distressing that the Ganga today is facing formidable pollution pressures and threats to its biodiversity and environmental sustainability. It finds its name in the list of the five most polluted rivers of the world[3]. An ever-growing population, inadequately planned urbanization and indiscriminate

industrialization have affected water quality in the river. Today, the waters of the river Ganga are sullied by sewage, as well as solid and industrial waste generated by human and economic activity along its banks. Consequently, the Ganga suffers from high levels of organic and bacterial pollution making it unfit not only for drinking but even for bathing and farming. The deterioration in the water quality impacts the people immediately. The industrial pockets at Moradabad, Rampur and Bareilly in the catchments of Ramganga and Kali rivers and in Kanpur city are significant sources of toxic effluents released into the river. The major contributors are the tanneries in Kanpur, distilleries, paper mills and sugar mills in the Kosi, Ramganga and Kali river catchments[4].

The adage of 'holy river' has rather become a myth today. The river Ganga starts getting polluted by chemicals from Rishikesh itself when it enters the plains. Studies reveal that nearly 2760 million litres per day of waste water is discharged directly into the Ganga at various locations. In Varanasi alone, 230.17 million litres per day of sewage is generated. A recent study conducted by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) indicates the presence of heavy metals in the vegetables grown with water from the Yamuna, making them potentially hazardous to our health[5]. All these facts are pointers towards an imperative need to maintain the cleanliness of rivers, ponds, water reservoirs, wells and other water bodies in our country.

Several efforts were made to address the growing pollution in the Ganga initially through the Ganga Action Plan. As this program had limited success, the river conservation plan was revamped through a new holistic approach. Accordingly, Ganga has been given the status of a National River and the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) has been established in 2009, headed by the Prime Minister. The Authority has been mandated to develop a multi-sector programme for ensuring pollution abatement in the Ganga which would clean up not just the main stem of the river, but the tributaries and distributaries that feed into and flow away from it. The 'Mission Clean Ganga' aims at ensuring that no untreated municipal sewage and industrial effluents flow into the river system by the year 2020.

Sewage Treatment Plants have been set-up in the cities situated along the river bank with suitable technologies, thereby letting only treated effluents into the river. The untreated municipal sewage and industrial wastewater flowing into the river is now being intercepted and diverted to the sewage treatment plants. Construction of bio-gas plants and electrical crematoriums on the river banks are also envisaged. The Solid waste management systems have been planned to prevent its dumping in the river.

However state intervention alone is not sufficient for conserving and regenerating River Ganga and our water bodies. I firmly believe that for achieving this ambitious objective, all the stakeholders including the Government, elected representatives, local bodies such as municipalities and Gram Panchayats, non-governmental organizations, media, intelligensia and the common man, must join hands. We, as responsible citizens, must be agents of change and spearhead this campaign.

As people's representatives, Parliamentarians have to play a proactive role in managing water resources and generate awareness for constantly monitoring and maintaining the water bodies in our respective areas. We have to motivate people, especially the youth to crusade for preserving River Ganga and all other water bodies. In fact, we must inculcate environmental ethics in the youngsters by highlighting these issues in schools. Environmental sensitization must be an integral part of primary education.

We have to transform the mindsets of the people and imbibe water conservation measures in

our daily lives. I am sure that the traditional wisdom of our communities of valuing each drop of water can be instrumental in conserving and regenerating our water bodies. We should also use modern science and technology to increase the efficiency of our water utilization.

We must undertake an extensive campaign to disseminate information amongst our constituents about the causes and consequences of polluting the rivers and encourage them to adopt measure to recharge and regenerate the water bodies in our constituencies. We can explore the possibility of using our MPLADS funds for this purpose. Let us resolve today to identify at least one depleting water body in our constituency and strive to clean and regenerate it.

I am confident that creative ideas, constructive suggestions and a road map for sustainable development and management of water resources especially River Ganga will emerge from this discussion.

I am delighted that three books are being released today. Given his stature as an outstanding parliamentarian, a compilation of Shri Somnath Chatterjee's select speeches titled, "Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy – Selected Speeches of Speaker Somnath Chatterjee" has been brought out. The book contains over 200 insightful speeches delivered by him after assuming the office of Speaker, Lok Sabha.

Shri Tridib Chaudhuri whose birth centenary we celebrated last year was a powerful voice in the Chambers of the Indian Parliament for many decades. The book titled "Tridib Chaudhuri in Parliament – A Commemorative Volume" is a representative selection of his speeches in Parliament.

The Third Hindi Edition of Practice and Procedure of Parliament titled "*Sansadiya Paddhati Aur Prakriya*" by M.N. Kaul and S.L. Shakhder has been published with the objective of having wider readership and understanding. I am sure all these books will be well received by the erudite readers.

Thank you.