Charter of all India Ganga Yamuna Panchayat, 8-10 February 2010 – K.R. Gupta and R.H. Sawarkar

Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS) and Manushi Sangathan (MS) in collaboration with Nehru Memorial Memorial and Library held an all India Panchayat on 8th, 9th and 10th February 2010 at Teen Murti Bhavan, New Delhi to begin a new chapter in facilitating a creative and effective participation of SARKAR – SAMAJ & SANTS to ensure success of the new Ganga Yamuna Action Plans holding promise of NIRMAL (pure) & AVIRAL (uninterrupted) flow from these two sacred rivers, Ganga and Yamuna. TBS and MS took the initiative, because Mr. Jairam Ramesh, Minister for Environment, showed keen interest to have an open dialogue to figure out ways of building institutional mechanism for ensuring transparent by accountable funding of the new Ganga-Yamuna Action plan with the participation of citizens, irrigation experts and social workers.

The Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteswaranandji, of Jotirmath, Badrinath presided over the meetings on all the 3 days. The Panchayat deliberated a review of the reasons for the tragic failure of the first Ganga Yamuna Action plan from the point of the civil society. Open and frank dialogue took place between the various stake holders to explore ways, and devise joint strategies to ensure that the 2010 Action Plan for rejuvenating the two sacred rivers of India will actually deliver the promised results. The Panchayat witnessed participation of river experts, environmental engineers, chartered accountants, advocates, medical practitioners, social workers, members of Ganga Yamuna Jalbiradaries from different parts of India, members of Parliament, Minister for Environment, sants and religious leaders as well as sitting members of the National Ganga Basin Authority (NGBA) and UP Ganga Basin Authority (UP GBA).

The Panchayat discussed the following factors that have affected the Ganga, Yamuna river systems.

(i) Denial of natural flow and ecosystem by construction of dams and tunnels.
(ii) Limitless drawal of water for towns and industries and discharging the untreated domestic and industrial waste into the rivers.
(iii) Excessive use of groundwater by deep tube wells, and of harmful pesticides in agriculture.
(iv) Mining and deforestation activities in the catchment area of Ganga and Yamuna basins.
(v) Unlawful encroachment, disposal of dead bodies, idols and lamps directly in the rivers.

Inaugural Session

Sri Digvijay Singh, General Secretary, All India Congress Committee delivered the inaugural address. Sri Singh touched upon the crises facing our rivers were Sunita Narain, C.S. Pran, Suresh Rohilion and L.C. Jain. Sunita Narain made comprehensive Powerpoint presentation as to how and why our rivers are dying and provided an agenda for their revitalization and change. She presented facts and figures related to the Ganga Action Plan I and II and the present status of the health of Ganga and of other Indian rivers. Regarding Ganga and its tributaries she pointed out that different stretches of the rivers have different problems such as damming of rivers for hydroelectric project, pollution of drinking water through lack of sanitation, lack of environmental flow and dumping of wastes in rivers, investment of large capital to pump water for domestic supply without planning for waste disposal, inequitable distribution of water in metropolitan cities, towns and villages. Her suggested Agenda was to allow minimum environmental flow in all sectors, assessment of total availability of water and community monitoring of distribution of water among different stake holders, and a plan to treat all sewage.

R.H. Siddiqui highlighted the distribution of water for irrigation. C.S. Pran presented a scheme of Youths and Organisations in river rejuvenation. Suresh Rohila proposed a program to develop and implement strategies for water resource management within the Ganga basin in the wake of climate change with a focus on partnership of stake holders community education and engagement, business and Government involvement and biodiversity, conservation in critical stretch of river encompassing approximating 800 km form Ganga to Kanpur. L.C. Jain pointed out lack of individual leadership in mobilizing community college Youth and School children in implementing all the water related matters.

Vikram Soni speaking on Yamuna Action Plan presented a Scheme for the natural storage of excess monsoon river to soak in and in storing water. This storage can then be used for withdrawal during the dry months. He illustrated this with evaluation of the potential of Yamuna flood plains in the national capital Territory of Delhi, and showed that there can be an annual yield of 600-900 MCM of water which is 34% of the total water supply in Delhi. R.C. Trivedi explained the sewage problem in 15 cities spread over 1374 km in 5 sub Yamuna basins. Raman highlighted the plight of Yamuna in and around Agra.

Sandeep Joshi demonstrated the role ecotechnology/ecology engineering can play in restoring the original status of Yamuna basin. Ibrahim Khan presented how rainwater harvesting has been carried out.

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Swami Shivanandaji highlighted the efforts and problems in stopping mining in the Ganga catchment in Haridwar. Menaka Gandhi spoke at length on Ganga pollution, and explained how it is linked with money and corruption. She suggested focusing on one item at a time and choosing about 8 places along Ganga for focused vigilance including the legal processes in local courts by submitting data on pollution with photos. She emphasized on creation of vigilance group and the need to start plastic free cities, towns, and villages, and in creation of ‘Save Ganga Fund’ by the civil society. U.S. Bhawalkar gave an account of treatment of sewage water without electricity from Godavari-Pawaji by use of biological catalyst. Siva Ramakrishnan explained how focus on GAP I got diverted to STPs without proper management, consideration of aquatic life balance and stoppage of river bed degradation and violent scouring of rivers. He explained how rivers have self purification capacity as long as minimum flow is maintained. Vinod Tare, IIT Kharagpur, gave Powerpoint presentation on Research and Development that is being carried out on the design of toilets, including railway wagons, where solids and liquids are separated. Vinod Bodhankar spoke on pollution at Pune city. Brijendra Singh spoke about the State of the river at Kanpur, and how they were successful in stopping leather industries in Kanpur. R.H. Sawkar spoke about the lack of mention of Ground Water in constitution. He suggested demarcation of Basins, sub basins and micro basins as units for development of Water, Forest and Mineral Resources and their equitable distribution among stake holders. He pointed out that the over exploitation of groundwater by tube wells has resulted in rapid depression of water table and reduction of base flow in the Ganga river. He suggested social control on cropping pattern, effective use of sprinkler and drip irrigation, R & D on urban and rural sanitation system and use of human waste as fertilizer. L.N. Mathur spoke about the role of CGWB in assessment of Ground Water Resources, spreading of education and building public awareness in rain harvesting and proper utilization of water.

In the open session G.D. Aggarwal, Vinod Bodhankar, Ravi Chopra, Sanjay Parik, Swami Shivananda, Prasant Bhushan discussed with delegates and finalized the salient points to be included in the charter of All India Ganga Yamuna Panchayat to be submitted to the minister.

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Sri M.C. Mehta traced the history of 100 years old movement to maintain free flow of Ganga. Before the arrival of Hon. Minister for environment, Madhu Kiswar, summarised the deliberations of the previous two days to arrive at an agreeable text of the GYP for further deliberation with Minister.

Sri Jairam Ramesh, Minister, assured that in 10 years no municipal waste water will be discharged into Ganga, no new project that endanger the ecosystem will be approved by his Ministry, action will be taken to increase the number of Dolphins in Ganga. He informed that among the State Government, best basin management plan is given by West Bengal and his Ministry after review of plans of other States will prepare a comprehensive plan for National River Ganga along with other 17 rivers covering India. He assured that full time mission directorate will come in to effect within three months. He further informed that Government is a system and the Panchayat should recommend proposals more realistic and implementable.

He further clarified Constitutional responsibility of State Pollution Control Boards and his Environment Ministry and problems of centralized and decentralized powers. M.C. Mehta and many delegates felt Ministers Constitutional responsibility should be towards people and environment more than to his Cabinet. Problem of decommissioning of few dams, not taking up half-completed dam works, not sanctioning new projects in Ganga basin were discussed and the minister assured his support to all proposals that can support for improvement in Ganga basin. Officers of the Environment Ministry gave a Powerpoint presentation on long term and short term programs related to Ganga Basin. After detailed discussion, the Panchayat unanimously passed the following resolutions to be presented to the Environmental Minister as Charter of Ganga – Yamuna Panchayat and also release the same to the Press.

Ganga-Yamuna Panchayat Charter

1. Rivers anywhere in the world are the lifeline of any society. However, Ganga and Yamuna are unique, having religious and spiritual significance in the hearts and minds of the Indian people. Unfortunately these rivers are dying which is a matter of serious concern not only for the survival of our physical being but the very basis on which our culture, spirituality, dharma and civilization, rests. These dying rivers can be revived and restored, only when the task is taken up as a sacred mission jointly by Sarkar, Samaj and Sants (the Government, the people and spiritual leaders), in all sincerity as a duty - as dharma – to be accomplished within a targeted time frame.

2. The Panchayat considers it a sacred duty to protect and preserve the pristine purity of Ganga and Yamuna. By focusing on Ganga and Yamuna it is not intended to undermine the religious, spiritual, social, cultural importance and significance of numerous other rivers of India. Rejuvenating these two rivers will inevitably activate a similar process for all other rivers as well.

3. Ganga and Yamuna are popularly referred to as nurturing mothers; they cannot be treated as mere “resources” to be exploited. The Government should amend the notification of Ganga
Yamuna Action Plans to give due respect to the dharmic and spiritual significance if these two rivers have in the hearts and minds of the people of India.

4. The three streams - Bhagirathi, Alaknanda and Mandakini, must be treated as integral parts of Ganga.

5. The Panchayat is of the firm belief that the protection, revival and rejuvenation of Ganga and Yamuna with all its eco-systems, will not only help in solving the problem of drinking water but will recharge the earth and make water available for rational use in agriculture, thus supporting the nation in its endeavor to attain food self-sufficiency.

What Government Must do

a. Institute effective and empower institutional mechanisms for people’s participation in giving direction, implementation as well as monitoring of Ganga Yamuna Action Plans, especially of those living in and around these two rivers.

b. Provide all information regarding these Action Plans in the public domain; Institutionalize effective measures for transparency and accountability right at the outset of these Plans. No money should be spent on these plans till such measures are put in place.

c. Change the nomenclature of the head of the Ganga Basin Authority to “Mukhya Sewak” and all other members as “Sewaks” to remind them that they are trustees on behalf of the people of this unique national and natural heritage.

d. Ensure that all the small rivers that merge into Ganga and Yamuna are given protection under the new Action Plan.

e. Declare a moratorium followed by a total ban on land use change of flood plains.

f. Scrap the dams under construction or in the pipe-line and decommission the already constructed dams in a phased manner within a set time frame as integral parts of Ganga Yamuna Action Plans.

g. Institute a total ban on dumping domestic sewage, solid waste and industrial waste into Ganga and Yamuna: It is not enough that waste and polluted water be treated with chemicals and poured into our sacred rivers. They need not be directed elsewhere for industrial, agricultural and domestic use. Polluted water-treated or untreated- should under no circumstances be dumped into the rivers Ganga and Yamuna.

h. Declare immediate moratorium followed by a total ban on land use change of flood plains.

i. Declare a permanent and total ban on construction, mining and all such activities detrimental to the health of the river in the catchments areas of the river in the mountains and in the flood plains. Only those activities such as planting trees which enhance the value of floodplains should be permitted.

j. Enact appropriate laws for the protection, preservation and sanctity of river Ganga and its main tributary Yamuna, since Ganga has been officially declared as a “National River”. Violation of this law must be treated as a criminal offence in addition to inviting punitive damages.

The New Ganga and Yamuna Action Plans must include the following

a. Be aimed at ensuring that the waters of Ganga and Yamuna flow aviral: "Gannam, gannam iti Ganga". This is a pre-condition for Ganga and Yamuna waters to retain the same quality of purity as found at Gangotri and Yamunotri.

b. Promote organic farming in the Ganga Yamuna belt and prevent the use of harmful chemical fertilizers and industrial chemicals which are currently seeping into the ground water and into Ganga Yamuna.

c. Undertake clear demarcation of flood plains all along the course of these rivers on maps as well as on the ground and make this information available in the public domain. This is urgently needed to make citizens aware of the endangered floodplains which need urgent protection and rejuvenation.

d. Undertake emergency measures for catchment area protection and treatment, protection of existing forests, regeneration and reforestation of Himalayan forests as well as river banks all along the course of Ganga and Yamuna with native varieties and Panchvati.

e. Implement on an emergency footing soil and water conservation measures and integrated watershed management of the Ganga basin.

f. Ensure rejuvenation of dying ponds, water channels, streams, rivulets, and all the tributaries of Ganga and Yamuna.

g. Assist cities and towns in conserving rain water and reviving their dying water bodies which will recharge groundwater sources for their daily needs instead of forcing them to draw from distant rivers at great expense. This will enable aviral flow of the fresh waters of Ganga and Yamuna.

h. Ensure the protection, rejuvenation and revival of the ecological health, flora and fauna and micro organisms of Ganga and Yamuna. These are the most reliable indicator of the health of the river.

i. Undertake active promotion of irrigation methods that involve scientific and rational use of water in agriculture.

j. Bring about effective control on pollution by harmful pesticides and insecticides used in agriculture which are poisoning both groundwater resources as well as river waters.