

Yamuna Forever : *Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan* (YJA), a citizen's movement to safeguard the interests of the river Yamuna

Note from Editors :

The Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan (YJA) is a citizen's movement on behalf of the great Yamuna River, which is a threatened natural resource in India today. If there were IUCN Criteria for rivers as there are for taxa, the Yamuna might be assessed as Critically Endangered or Endangered, surely as Threatened. River Yamuna in Delhi has been recognized as THE most Polluted river of all the rivers in the country.

One of our oldest Zoo Outreach Organisation members and perhaps our oldest regular contributor to ZOOS' PRINT, Manoj Mishra, under the auspices of PEACE Institute, of which he is primate motivator or founder and Director, has started a movement to address the issues which threaten Yamuna's future as a life-saving resource of all the five kingdoms of life.

PEACE and YJA have sent a letter to the Prime Minister begging his attention to an impending event of great popularity, the CG 2010 games. We have asked Manoj for a brief to elucidate the issues which confront us now in this matter and he has kindly provided an easy reference of What, Why, Who, etc., as well as a map of the Yamuna and a copy of the Appeal to the Prime Minister and Government of India.

Sanjay Molur, Editor & Sally Walker, Editor Emeritus.

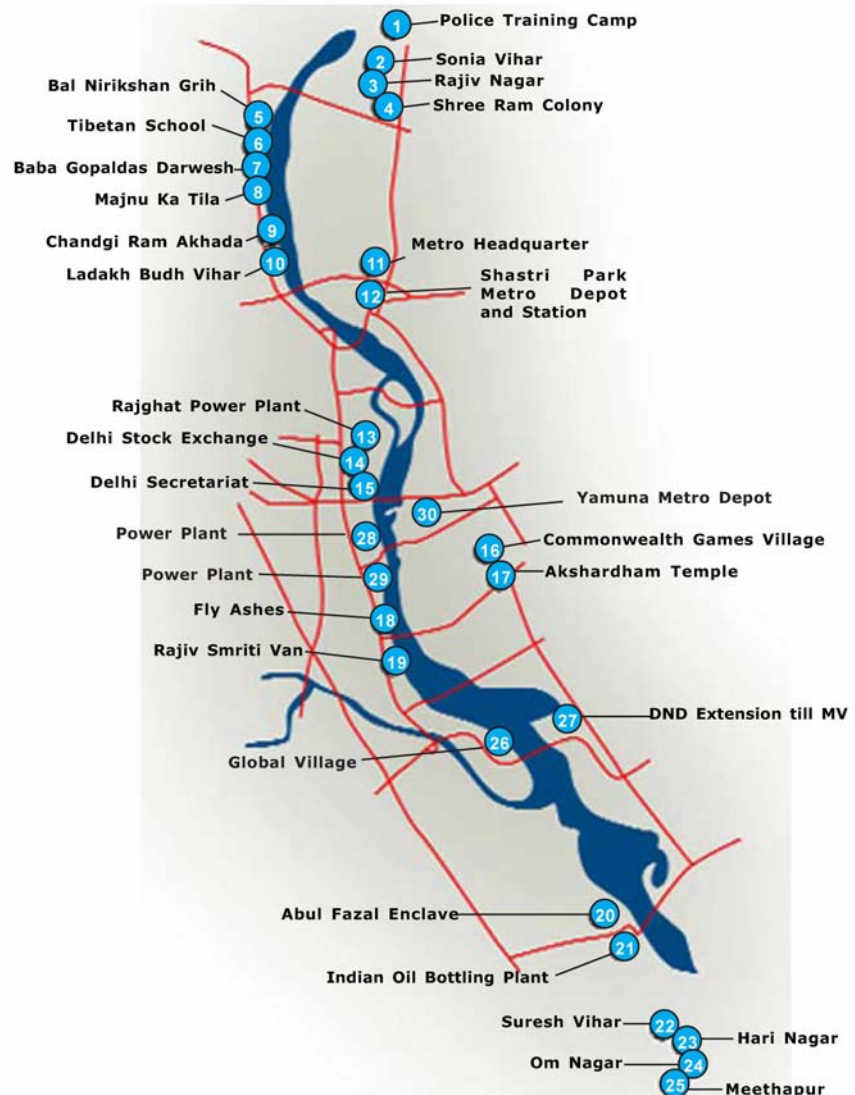
Why?

Apprehending a permanent damage to the river Yamuna in Delhi from default or design by the 'developmental' forces unleashed by the construction of residential quarters including hotels in the river Yamuna bed for the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in 2010 a group of key environmental organizations and like-minded individuals from the city of Delhi have come together on 7 Feb 2007 to form as an urgent 'felt need' an independent and a political awareness generation and advocacy citizen's consortium called the 'Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan' (YJA) – Yamuna forever Campaign.

Who?

Initiated by the PEACE Institute Charitable Trust, a Delhi based and experienced nature conservation organization, the founding membership of YJA consists of:

Current status of existing and potential land use conversion of Yamuna Flood Plain in Delhi



Pictorial: (Source: Adapted from Tehelka issue dated 19 August 06)

Toxics Link – an NGO working for several years on issues relating to increasing toxic levels in the environment and related matters in the country

Pani Morcha – a movement working for both Ganga and Yamuna since early nineties

Matu People's Organisation – A group working amongst masses on river security issues

Ridge Bachao Andolan – A group active for conserving and protecting the Delhi Ridge

LIFE – an organization of environmental lawyers

CMS environment – A division of

Centre for Media Studies, a New Delhi based media research and advocacy centre

How?

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU)

Recognizing that river Yamuna is not only a sacred river of India but an aquatic life line for millions of people and others dependent on it for sustenance.

- Aware that the river Yamuna is integrally linked with the culture and history of India
- Aware that the waters of free

flowing Yamuna, once it enters the plains from the hills is appropriated all along its course without sparing even the minimum flow needed to keep river alive and meet needs of the downstream people

- Aware that the river Yamuna is today critically threatened from increasing pollution load emanating as much from domestic refuse as from agricultural and industrial effluents
- Aware that the river bed of Yamuna as well as its flood plains are under increasing pressure of conversion into alternative land use for various purposes which are driven primarily by the needs of economic growth but at the cost of the river's integrity as an ecosystem
- Aware that the state has and continues to work for improving the state of the river
- Recognizing the need for a concerted civil society effort to safeguard the river as an ecosystem and as a provider of essential ecological services
- Obligated and empowered by a constitutional duty under section 51-A(g) of the Indian Constitution viz.,

'It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures'

- Believing in and Promoting the use of natural and degradable things, and of saving water from wastage and pollution
- Appreciating the power and value of a well researched and informed stand
- Believing in the power of 'positive' action in a *satyagrah* mode, for bringing in change in pursuance of a cause

We the following in our personal and institutional capacity (where applicable) agree to

1. join together voluntarily as a citizen's advocacy and lobby group to be called as YAMUNA JIYE ABHIYAAN (Yamuna Forever Campaign)
2. do all in our capacity to contribute, aid, assist and promote actions agreed by the group in the interest of the revival of river Yamuna back to its pristine state. Read and signed this day the seventh day of February 2007 at New Delhi

Signed: Toxics Link; Paani Morcha;



Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan

21 March 2007

To,

Dr. Man Mohan Singh
Hon'ble Prime Minister of India
South Block, Raisina Hill,
New Delhi,
India-110 011
NEW DELHI

APPEAL FROM CITIZENS OF DELHI

- Aware that the 22 km stretch of river Yamuna in Delhi is the life line of the city
- Aware that the flood plains of the river are critical for the ground water recharge
- Aware that a substantial part of the water supply to the city of Delhi is met and shall continue to be met from ground water sources
- Aware that the CGWB has identified the river Yamuna flood plains in Delhi as a huge reservoir of ground water with high to very high recharge potential
- Aware that the city of Delhi is flood prone and the primary purpose of river flood plains is control and seepage of flood waters
- Aware that no building should be raised in the flood plains since the city of Delhi lying in zone IV of seismic map is vulnerable to severe damage from an earthquake and within the city it is the flood plain (due to its unstable sub strata) which is the most vulnerable
- Aware that the river Yamuna flood plain between the two embankments on its western and eastern bank is under severe threat of conversion into alternate land uses including commercial uses (please see enclosed diagram)
- Understanding that the games village for the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in Delhi in 2010, is proposed to be built in the river Yamuna flood plains with danger of ushering in an irreversible process of the commercialization and conversion of the already beleaguered flood plain
- Knowing that there are other sites in the city where the said games village can safely be built

Accordingly,

We the residents of the city of Delhi,

Earnestly appeal, in the light of the above, to your good self to -

1. Kindly reconsider the proposal to build the Commonwealth Games 2010 village in the river flood plain and to shift it to some other safer site away from the river Yamuna.
2. Declare the river Yamuna flood plain as sacrosanct and inviolate to enable it to continue to play its all important role in ground water recharge and control of floods

We remain,

Yours truly,

Advisors Samar Singh H S Panwar Sureshwar D Sinha

Members CMS Environment / LIFE / Matu People's Organisation / Pani Morcha / PEACE Institute / Ridge Bachao Andolan / Toxics Link

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CMS environment; Matu People's Organisation; LIFE; Ridge Bachao Andolan; PEACE Institute Charitable Trust (Secretariat) and a number of eminent and concerned citizen's of Delhi

Activities till date?

- Reached out to all key decision makers in the country including the Hon President and the PM of India through formal appeals in the matter
- Presentations have been made on the issue to like-minded organizations and people
- Working on preparing a 'Citizen's White paper on Yamuna'
- Reaching out to media within and

outside the country for the needful

- Reaching out to all like-minded organisations and wider public for the development of a strong and vocal constituency amongst the masses for the protection and maintenance of rivers as ecosystems beginning first with river Yamuna.
- Started a signature campaign for seeking endorsement of the Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan as a worthwhile initiative for a cause requiring urgent ameliorative actions.



Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan