

# Editorial

Imphal, Friday, March 11, 2016

## Wasting the nature's gift

Mother Nature is not so cruel. The moment when the people of this land started crying for water, she pours it from the sky. But we are so cruel to her that the blessing was sabotaged by wasting it at streets and other filthy potholes. In a world where technology had reached its height, where leaders of the western nations talk about building modern cities under the sea or somewhere at the sky, we in this portion of the earth do not know how to make good use of what Mother Nature has gifted us. It is a known fact that during dry season people of this region face acute shortage of water and during rainy season the place is normally flooded with the rain water. This phenomenon has been experiencing by the people for the past few decades. No people of this generation have ever heard our great grandfather facing such a disastrous phenomenon. This clearly shows that the present crisis of water is the creation of this generation. One cannot simply blame on the mass deforestation as a result of the drastic situation being faced by the people. Politicians and those who are running the government cannot make their way out of this by blaming the citizens for not following the orders of the government. Draughts and floods which were once only learnt through geography books and newspapers have now become routine event of this little state since the last two three decades. As for the Imphalites from a small child who can read and write to those who hold top post in the government departments or those doing doctoral degree in any discipline, everyone knows that the kind of flood or draught that we the people of Manipur are facing every year is a man made one created by lack of proper planning on water management. Every time when the people faced such a situation there will be hue and cry from the side of the general public demanding the government for a proper water policy for the state. Even at the state assembly, some of the MLAs had brought up the issue and drew the attention of the government for proper management of water by framing a water policy. Concerned Ministers in the government every time assured to look into it but nothing visible action was seen taken up. This is perhaps those in power responsible or looking after this section of department - say, for example the Irrigation and Flood Control Department (IFCD) and Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) seems to be deliberately waiting for occurrence of flood or draught. Everyone knows that when there is flood the Ministers or the authority of the government department looking after it are entitled to spend huge amount of money in the name of taking up relief measures. This fund utilized, it only benefitted to those who are actually assigned to utilize it. So, if no draught or flood no special package or huge fund to utilize it at which they can manage to arrange to get their share. Which means that those in the government never wanted a solution to flood or draught in this state which have adequate amount of rainfall every year.

## AMWJU leaders to join World Cultural Festival

**Imphal, March 11:** As invited a three-member delegation of the All Manipur Working Journalists' Union (AMWJU) led by its president Wangkhemcha Shamjai left Imphal yesterday to join the three-day World Culture Festival beginning Friday (March 11) at New Delhi's DND Flyway.

Over 35 lakh people from 155 countries are expected to join the festival being organized to commemorate 35 years of service by the Art of Living. The other two AMWJU delegation members joining the festival are Manipur Press Club Secretary K Sarojkumar Sharma and the Union's executive member Sunzu BM.

# Yamuna and AoL: selective environmentalism?

NIVEDITA KHANDEKAR

At the outset, a disclaimer: Having covered Yamuna pollution and other environmental issues related to water, I am against any kind of construction - temporary or permanent - on river floodplains, not just in the case of the Yamuna but for that matter, the flood plains of any other river or the catchment of any water body. So, I should have been happy to see almost all the news channels taking a huge interest in what has now been termed as a controversial event - the World Culture Festival (WCF) to be organised by the Art of Living foundation (AoL) of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar opposite Mayur Vihar Phase I in East Delhi. With environmental activists pursuing the matter at the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and almost all news channels vying for the latest development and/or newest angle related to the event/NGT case, viewers were led to believe that the temporary construction as claimed by AoL on the Yamuna flood plains, where the event is to be held, is a massive violation of environmental laws. But is it actually so? Is the AoL event the only violation taking place on the Yamuna floodplain? Is it 'all is well' for the rest of the Yamuna floodplains, at least in Delhi? It is indeed intriguing to see the sudden interest that television channels are showing in environmental activism. The problem: Why have the channels woken up only now? "But is it actually so? Is the AoL event the only violation taking place on the Yamuna floodplain? Is it 'all is well' for the rest of the Yamuna floodplains, at least in Delhi?" During this week (especially starting Sunday right up to March 9, 2015, when the NGT gave a nod to the event with a hefty fine), various channels have carried different programmes - prime time debates, features, interviews and versions from various environmentalists. Aaj Tak even ran a poll asking its viewers to vote yes or no on whether the army should have made the pontoon bridge for the AoL event. On March 9, 2016, NDTV too held a prime time show which discussed "damage to ecology, misuse of the military and Sri Sri & The Art of Controversy". Earlier, even CNBC TV18 carried Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's interview. Not all programmes were critical of

the event. CNN IBN managed to give a positive touch by showcasing the young performers who will appear at the event (). Zee News, not surprisingly, gave it a different twist on its 'Taal Thok Ke' asking "If Kumbh can be held on Ganga banks why not a cultural fest on Yamuna banks?". India TV too ran shows that were indirectly supporting the event, though discussing the objections raised by environmentalists. And then, there was the 'Press Conference', the 'interview by many' format programme, featuring Sri Sri Ravi Shankar on ABP News on March 9. Almost all the channels covered the issue. Times Now went with almost nil coverage but did carry a detailed news report when the NGT gave a nod. And it did carry environmentalists' version in that report (Plea to stall Sri Sri event rejected - too). So why am I not happy about the extensive coverage? Over the last three decades, Delhi has continuously witnessed the destruction of Yamuna floodplains, the very lifeline for the city. Be it construction of Delhi Metro lines, its depots and even the residential quarters on the Yamuna floodplains; be it the Akshardham temple or the Commonwealth Games village. Examples abound. Before the NGT was created, it was the Delhi High Court or the Supreme Court that heard cases related to the Yamuna. The NGT regularly hears cases against government authorities abusing the Yamuna floodplains - the DTC bus depot near Nizamuddin bridge; the upcoming extension to the Barapulla Elevated Road connecting the Sarai Kale Khan end with Mayur Vihar and the portion of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation's (DMRC) new line joining the upcoming Sarai Kale Khan station going over the Yamuna to the Mayur Vihar Phase I station, being the ongoing cases. The print media and the news agencies have regularly and routinely covered all these cases and have been consistently reporting such violations of environmental laws. For instance, in October 2015, the NGT had actually applied brakes to the extension of the elevated road as the authorities had set up a batching/concrete mixer plant right on the floodplains and the PWD

contractor had illegally levelled and raised land on both the western and eastern bank of the river blocking an active Yamuna channel in the process. Also consider this: "Some photographs show heavy debris, iron junk and other construction material belonging to DMRC lying in the Sarai Kale Khan to Mayur Vihar stretch, near Lalita Park and the old pontoon bridge. Let DMRC remove all debris and other construction material. In the event of default, the managing director of DMRC shall personally appear before the tribunal on the next date of hearing," said a bench headed by NGT chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar on July 22, 2015. But no channel has ever discussed this issue. No channel has ever taken up such a topic for its prime time debate. Incidentally, the channels' websites do carry stories sent out by PTI or IANS on this issue but the channels' own content never or rarely figured the Yamuna. In another case, the NGT has been repeatedly taking the Delhi government to task over its failure to remove the DTC bus depot from the river bed. The print media has been reporting this as routine stories, special stories and sometimes even an editorial/opinion piece. Incidentally, the UP link road, the NH 24 and the Ring Road-Nizamuddin bridge T-point fall on the daily driving route of scores of television journalists, and in some cases television anchor/editors, who either reside in Delhi and drive to work to Noida or live in Noida/Ghaziabad and drive to Delhi. The massive space occupied by the L&T site office just near the Nizamuddin bridge - Ring Road T-point - is a case in point. It is surely causing permanent damage to the flood plains. Even when you make concessions that the metro is a mass public transport and hence a much necessary evil vis-à-vis construction related to its lines crossing the Yamuna, why have the television channels never raised any hue and cry over its massive train depot at Shastri Park, and later near the Yamuna Bank metro station, or its residential quarters - obviously permanent - right next to the Yamuna Bank metro station? While it was the NDA government in an earlier avatar which gave a

ahead to the Akshardham temple, it was the UPA government that allowed the Commonwealth Games village to come up bang in the middle of the floodplains. The entire Yamuna falls in the 'O' zone of the Delhi Development Authority's (DDA) Master Plan for Delhi. And government after government, both at the Centre and at Delhi, have only worked to shrink and deteriorate it further. So the question that comes obviously to one's mind is: Why have the channels woken up only now? It is nobody's case that the channels cannot take on the government agencies violating any norms. Or is it easy to target an NGO and easier to neglect what government agencies are doing to damage the floodplains? Now that the NGT on March 9, 2016 finally gave permission to the event with Rs 5 crore fine imposed on the AoL for restoration of the river bank and flood plains after the event, it seems the programme will go ahead. So will it be expecting too much that the same news channels - which endlessly debated the environmental damage to Yamuna floodplains, which gave more than usual attention to an event from the environmental angle and which have in general a poor track record of covering issues from outside metro cities - that they will do equally good follow up post the event? That is, keep checking and covering to see if the AoL has actually restored the flood plains as promised during the NGT hearing. Also, will it be too much to expect that these television channels will now cover all Yamuna related cases in the NGT with equal gusto? That they will also rigorously debate the DMRC dumping debris or occupying a far greater area on the Yamuna floodplains with much more damaging material? That they will turn to other cities too where government authorities and of course private parties have damaged flood plains beyond limit?

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## National & International News

### We need more time to deposit fine - AOL

**Courtesy TNN**  
**New Delhi, March 11:** The Art of Living (AoL), which is organizing the World Culture Festival on the Yamuna floodplains, on Friday filed an appeal in the National Green Tribunal (NGT) saying it needs at least four weeks' time to deposit Rs 5-crore fine and to comply with all directions of the tribunal. "We are a charitable organization and it is difficult for us to generate Rs 5 crore in a short period," the AoL said in its petition. The AoL father said that "Rs 5-crore fine be taken as restoration amount for biodiversity park and

not as penalty." The NGT had said on Thursday that the AoL will have to deposit Rs 5-crore fine imposed on it by 5pm on Friday. If it failed to do so, the law will take its own course, the NGT said. On Wednesday, the NGT had ordered AoL to pay the fine "prior to commencement of the event". However, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, the founder of AoL, said on Thursday he would rather go to jail than pay the fine imposed by NGT for environmental violations on the floodplains due to massive constructions. He had also tweeted that AoL was not "satisfied" with

the verdict of the NGT and would appeal against it, adding, "Satyamev Jayate". On Thursday, The tribunal had refused to give an urgent hearing on a fresh plea seeking a stay on the three-day event, alleging that AoL has not taken permissions from the competent authorities as directed by the tribunal. "There is no urgency in it. You can file a proper application and point out the deficiencies in compliance with the directions of the tribunal. We will see if there is any breach or (something is) not as per the law," the bench said.

### NHRC issues notice

**New Delhi, March 11:** The National Human Rights Commission, NHRC has issued notices to Tamil Nadu government over the reported brutal assault on an indebted farmer by bank officials and police in the state. Taking suo motu cognizance of the media report, NHRC issued notices to the secretary and DG Police of the State and sought a report within two weeks. The media reports said that officials of a private bank with the assistance of police came to seize the tractor of a farmer and brutally attacked him and forcibly took him to a police vehicle, as he wanted to recover the money he had borrowed.

### CBI registers case

**Puri, March 11:** The Central Bureau of Investigation has registered a case against two senior officials of public sector unit Orissa Mineral Development Company and others for allegedly causing a loss of 350 crore rupees to the exchequer. The agency had conducted searches on the premises of the accused persons in seven places including Delhi, Kolkata and Sultanpur in Uttar Pradesh yesterday. The alleged offence was committed during the period 2003-2010 by the officials in transferring shares of a sponge-iron joint venture company to private firms in violation of the rules, which resulted in huge loss to the exchequer.

### SC refuses to entertain PIL for dropping action against Guj cops

**New Delhi, March 11:** The Supreme Court today refused to entertain a PIL seeking quashing of criminal prosecution, suspension and other action taken against Gujarat cops in the 2004 alleged fake encounter killing of Ishrat Jahan in view of recent testimony of jailed LeT operative David Headley. However, the bench clarified that it was not dismissing the petition on merits. The plea seeking quashing of action taken against Gujarat cops refers to the statement of Headley,

the Pakistani-American terrorist, recorded before a Mumbai court that Jahan was a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) operative. Gujarat Police personnel, including ex-cop Vanzara, are facing trial in a Mumbai court for their alleged role in the encounter. The plea had sought a direction to close criminal proceedings and action taken in FIRs lodged by CBI against the Gujarat Police personnel and others, saying it was unconstitutional within the judicial facts and evidences of

Headley. It had also sought a direction from the court declaring that killing of a terrorist is not an offence under Indian law and proper compensation be paid to the state police personnel in the interest of justice. It also wanted initiation of suo motu perjury/contempt proceedings against the then Home Minister and CBI Director for concealing true facts before the Supreme Court and the Gujarat High Court and for filing a false affidavit pertaining to facts about the case.

**MSPDC**  
 OFFICE OF THE MANAGER: SINGJAMEI REVENUE SUB-DIVISION, MANIPUR STATE POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY LIMITED

**PRESS RELEASE**  
 Dated/Imphal, the 10<sup>th</sup> March, 2016

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