

Govt. unveils plan to clean Ganga by 2020

The Ganga might just flow clean by 2020.

The newly created National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) will take up the task on “mission mode”, according to Jairam Ramesh, minister of state, ministry of environment and forests (MoEF).

The exercise will cost the government Rs.15,000 crore over the next 10 years, of which the Indian government expects the World Bank to lend \$ 1 billion for the first phase.

“By 2020, no municipal sewage or industrial effluent will flow into the Ganga without complete treatment,” said Ramesh at a press conference on Monday. The decisions were taken at the first meeting of the NGRBA, which was set up in February.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh presided over the meeting, which was attended by Montek Singh Ahluwalia, deputy chairman, Planning Commission; Jaipal Reddy, urban development minister; Pawan Bansal, minister of parliamentary affairs and water resources, and Ramesh. Chief Ministers of the concerned states and eight non-officio members were also present.

The Ganga basin covers Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal. In terms of its importance, the basin constitutes 26% of the country’s land mass and provides water for drinking and irrigation to 43% of its population.

The new authority’s precursor, Ganga Action Plan (GAP), which was started in April 1985 has been a failure in cleaning the river, in spite of Rs.20,000 crore being spent over the years, as Mint reported in a series of three reports from 1-3 September.

Though the Centre has suggested that the total estimated cost be shared by the states and the Centre (70% by the Centre and 30% by the states), the chief ministers of Bihar and Uttarakhand opposed the idea in the meeting. “Therefore, the PM has decided that the Planning Commission will take the decision later,” added Ramesh.

The environment ministry has also submitted a proposal for the grant of Rs.1,320 crore as a one-time allocation to the 13th Finance Commission for operation and maintenance needs of sewage treatment plants for five years.

On the issue of dams on the river, which has been controversial as environmental activists from Uttarakhand have claimed that dams will restrict the

river's natural flow, Ramesh said that a 130 km stretch from Gaumukh to Uttarkashi in Uttarakhand might be declared as a no-project area. Such a move is pending a joint report to be prepared by the MoEF and the power ministry.

Ramesh said the mistakes that were made by the GAP will not be repeated in this phase. "One difference is that the GAP will not be repeated in this phase. "One difference is that the GAP took up work on a town basis but NGRBA will be on basin-wide basis. Two, GAP stressed on sewage treatment and this one will be on sewage treatment as well as catchment area treatment," he added.

A comprehensive river basin management plan will be ready by December 2010. Before that, ongoing sewage treatment projects will be put on the fast track and states will finalise detailed reports on new such projects in heavily polluted stretches and major towns on the Ganga and its major tributaries by 30 November.

[Source: Mint, 6 October, 2009](#)