

[OneWorld South Asia Home](#) > [In depth](#) > [Development](#) > [Water/sanitation](#)

OneWorld South Asia

Search for

[NEWS](#)

[IN DEPTH](#)

[PARTNERS](#)

[GET INVOLVED](#)

11 July 2005

OneWorld.net

[English](#)

[About Us](#) [Contact Us](#)

Waste, Development Chokes Sacred Indian River

[Rahul Kumar](#)

[OneWorld South Asia](#)

23 September 2004

NEW DELHI, Sept 23 (OneWorld) - Environmentalists warn that mammoth construction projects cleared by the government on the banks of the Yamuna -one of India's most sacred rivers in the capital, New Delhi - are violating environmental norms and killing the river.

The demand for land on the river's bank is spiraling. In the last couple of years, large tracts were allocated for a massive temple project, the capital's first metro rail, and a swanky private flyover.

The result? The construction of these projects has drastically reduced the river's width from 2.5 kilometers to just 500 meters.

The nearly 1,370 kilometer Yamuna originates from the towering Himalayas in the north Indian state of Uttaranchal. It flows through the northern states of Haryana and Delhi, meeting another holy Indian river – the Ganges - in the north Indian city of Allahabad.

In Delhi, the river covers a 22 kilometer stretch where it ingests most of the pollution in the form of domestic and industrial

oneworld.net

South Asia

[OUR NETWORK](#)

[Login](#)

[Join OneWorld](#)

[Printable version](#)

sewage.

Despite warnings from planners and environmental activists, the Indian as well as Delhi governments are eyeing large tracts of land on the river bed for various other projects. These include a huge games village for the Commonwealth Games scheduled for 2010. Land has also been earmarked for a training camp for the Delhi Police.

Alleges Dunu Roy, the director of Delhi-based nongovernmental organization Hazards Centre, "Nearly 32 affluent, powerful and politically well-connected groups have taken land on the river bed. The land around the river has now been marked for sale and commercialization, which will be disastrous for the city."

Professor and Head of Urban Design at the School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi, KT Ravindran alleges the government is not conducting Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports for these projects even though these are mandatory.

According to Ravindran, India's federal ministry of urban development had planned to create a Manhattan on the river bed in 1988, but, he says, "because of staunch opposition over environmental concerns, the proposal was placed on the backburner."

He adds that the river, which is the main recharge zone of the city, provides most of the groundwater for Delhi and is still the largest source of drinking water for Delhites.

Given the fact that the river is the receptacle of pollution from nearly 22 drains, which dump domestic and industrial sewage into the Yamuna, the consequences could be disastrous. These drains dump more pollution into the river than many cities clubbed together. Delhi discharges around 3,296 MLD (million litres per day) of sewage, nearly 1,300 of which is not treated.

In defense of the government, additional director of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) RC Trivedi says, "The government has constructed nearly 21 Sewage Treatment Plants (STP) to clean up domestic sewage and 15 Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs) to clean up industrial waste water."

He adds that another solution for decreasing pollution in the Yamuna is to get additional water from neighboring states. An earlier plan to do this encountered roadblocks for as he puts it, "We realized it would not leave the north Indian states of Haryana and Punjab, which are the largest wheat producing states, with enough water to irrigate their crops."

For their part, environmentalists rubbish governmental efforts to clean up the river. Remarks Roy, "The STPs and the CETPs are not working properly. These have been constructed at a massive cost, but their running cost, for which the government lacks resources, is equally phenomenal."

The result? Shrugs Roy, "Untreated sewage and waste water goes into the treatment plants and untreated sewage and waste water comes out of it again."

Thermal power plants located on the bank of the river are also dumping flyash into the Yamuna. Experts say flyash, which is fine and dust-laden with hazardous chemicals, is seeping into the ground water through the river.

But uncontrolled development and skewed planning has been slowly killing the river over the last three decades. Says Roy, "In the 1962 master plan for Delhi, the river was marked for fishing, agriculture and greens. But in 1990, it was left unmarked."

Currently, there is a fresh move which could spell doom for the river. Informs Roy, "The latest master plan being developed now, intends to use the river and its surrounding areas for commercial purposes."

Environmentalists blame the lack of public interest in the Yamuna on the fact that the common man no longer associates with the river.

As Ravindran puts it, "People do not visit the river because it is too dirty and polluted and contains too little water. Ironically, people do not feel for it despite the fact that the city gets most of its drinking water from it."

Related links

- > [The Energy and Resources Institute](#)
- > [Sanctuary Asia](#)

User comments

There are no comments



▣ [Back to top](#)

OneWorld thematic channels and collaborative projects include:



[About OneWorld](#)