

NIRMAL GANGA AVIJAN 2007

River Ganga after a long journey from the Himalayas through North Indian plains enters the state of West Bengal. Downstream of Farakka before the river leaves West Bengal and moves towards Bangladesh, it gets divided into two branches. One of the branches, namely Bhagirathi-Hooghly travels southward in Murshidabad district and flows for about 250 kilometers to reach the Bay of Bengal. During its long southward journey from Murshidabad to the Bay of Bengal, river Bhagirathi-Hooghly receives seven major tributaries and two smaller distributaries (Jalangi and Churni). The city of Kolkata is located on the eastern bank of river Ganga, which is generally known as river Hooghly.

River Hooghly is the lifeline of West Bengal. Most of the rivers of the state are either directly or indirectly connected with River Hooghly including the important wetlands of the districts of Murshidabad, Malda, Nadia, South 24 Parganas, Hooghly and Howrah. Even though reverence is accorded to Ganga as a gesture of acknowledgment of its life-sustaining abilities, serious awareness for protecting the river has still not been developed. As a result, general public, as well as municipalities, industries and Kolkata Port Trust still use the river as a dumping ground.

Ganga Action Plan is an ongoing process. Apart from intervention of the states, participation of people to clean up Ganga remains an important issue for maintaining the wholesomeness of the river water quality. In order to motivate people to protect the river from pollution, the 'Nirmal Ganga Awareness Campaign' was initiated in a befitting manner, by way of involving all municipalities, industries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government agencies and the students of schools and colleges.

Shri Sailen Sarkar, Hon'ble Minister-in-Charge, Departments of Parliamentary Affairs & Environment, Government of West Bengal declared the outline of first phase (duration: 18-02-2007 to 12-06-2007) of Nirmal Ganga Avijan in January 2007. The basic guidelines of the first phase of Nirmal Ganga Awareness Campaign were as follows:

- To conduct a programme for cleaning both sides of River Ganga by involving school children;
- To arrange a 'Sit-and-Draw' competition for school children;
- To arrange competitions such as quiz, debate and extempore speech for children;
- To put up hoardings with the messages on the 'ban of plastic carry bags' and maintenance of the wholesomeness of the water quality of River Ganga;
- To place fixed bins along the banks of the river for facilitating the collection of flowers/leaves used during religious/social festivals in order to restrict the disposal of the same in to the river; and
- To plant trees in the river front area.

After completion of the first phase of Nirmal Ganga Avijan as per the request of different municipalities and government departments, the second phase of Nirmal Ganga Avijan started on 01-10-2007 and would continue up to 31-12-2007. The basic guidelines of the second phase of Nirmal Ganga Avijan are as follows:

- To clean the river sides involving different NGOs and environmental activists, and also the working force of the municipalities or corporations as the case may be;
- Beautification of the bathing ghats, and installation of bins to collect wastes and dispose of the same in dumping grounds by the municipalities;

- During ensuing puja festival, effective action to be taken by municipalities or corporations for lifting the debris after immersion of the idols, and maintaining the guidelines as fixed up by the WBPCB; and
- Extensive plantation programme on the banks of river Ganga.