

Centre directs States to prevent dumping of dead bodies in Ganga and focus on their safe disposal and providing support for ensuring dignified cremation.

Stopping of dumping of dead bodies as well as their safe disposal and protection of water quality has to be attended to on war footing: Secretary, Jal Shakti

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The country is facing an extraordinary situation wherein a number of COVID-19 cases and consequential deaths have been on the rise in many States and UTs in the recent past. Dumping of dead bodies/ partially burnt or decomposed corpses in the river Ganga and its tributaries have recently been reported. This is most undesirable and alarming.

Secretary, Ministry of Jal Shakti Shri Pankaj Kumar, on 15th May, reviewed the position and action taken in the states of UP and Bihar wherein States appraised the latest position and further action points were decided. The Secretary highlighted the instructions already given and wanted expeditious action and also underscored the need to give equal attention to such incidents in urban as well as rural areas along Ganga and other rivers. Stopping of dumping of dead bodies as well as their safe disposal and protection of water quality has to be attended to on war footing. He said that after knowing the progress from states, CWC, CPCB and State Pollution Control Boards would also be giving their feedback and action plans.

Shri Rajiv Ranjan Mishra, Director General, National Mission for Clean Ganga stated that the situation is being followed up with several districts like Unnao, Kanpur rural, Ghazipur, Balia and Buxar, Saran in Bihar. However, some cases are also reported from other districts as well. He asked the state missions to follow up action taken with all districts. He said that there is need to strengthen enforcement, maintain vigil and also take proactive action to facilitate and support the families for cremation of dead bodies and asked state missions to specifically report on this. If needed, Project Directors can assess and also give support to District Ganga Committees for this out of NMCG funds available with them while keeping NMCG informed.

Uttar Pradesh was represented by Shri Rajnish Dubey, Addl Chief Secretary, Urban Development and Shri Anurag Shrivastava, Principal Secretary, Jal Shakti, Government of Uttar Pradesh and Project Director, State Ganga Mission. Mr Shrivastava shared that all the district magistrates in the states have been alerted about the issue and NMCG's instructions have been shared. These district magistrates are getting patrolling carried out to prevent dumping of dead bodies in Ganga. He also informed that 13 crematoriums under Namami Gange in addition to existing ones are made available for cremation of dead bodies. It was informed that orders have been issued for financial support in urban areas. Mr Dubey shared that similar orders for financial support of Rs 5000 have also been issued by Panchayati Raj Department for rural areas, similar to urban areas, and SDRF and other forces have also been asked to do patrolling. Authorities are in touch with Panchayats and ULBs.

Shri. Anand Kishore, Principle Secretary, Urban Development and Project Director, State Ganga Mission, Government of Bihar informed that the state has decided that cremation or burial of people dying due to COVID-19 and in such situations as above, will be borne by the Bihar government. He added that even if the deceased did not have 'positive' report of infection and had shown corona symptoms the family will be

offered this support. He also said that patrolling is being done to prevent further dumping of dead bodies in the river, especially in sensitive districts like Buxar and Saran (Chhapra). A mahajaal is being used at Buxar to locate and take out dead bodies. He was asked to keep vigil on bridges and other vulnerable areas including districts down stream.

Shri Halder, Chairman, Central Water Commission also informed that they are monitoring flow and water quality through their stations and will further increase frequency. Shri Prashant Gargava, Member Secretary, Central Pollution Control Board apprised that the board has forewarned all water monitoring stations along Ganga and her tributaries. The periodicity of testing water quality has also been increased. Shri DP Mathuria, ED, Technical, NMCG gave further details and would be coordinating with CWC and CPCB.

Ms. Debashree Mukherjee, Addl. Secretary, MoJS stated that besides urgent assessment of the risks imposed to the river-side communities by the PCBs, there is need for spreading awareness with the river side communities on do's/ don't for the use of river water and to prevent such incidents of dumping of bodies in the river.

Taking note of the above status and action taken so far, it was further decided that along with action to prevent dumping of dead bodies in river, burying of dead bodies in sand along the river must also be prevented. A suitable awareness generation program needs to be taken up against the ill effects of such practices. State Pollution Control Boards were directed to improve and make more frequent water quality monitoring in consultations with the health department. The CPCB was assigned the task of over-all monitoring and giving guidance to state pollution control boards and to take up advanced analysis in the matter. Support for cremation needs to be given top priority for safe and dignified cremation. Effective implementation of the Govt orders needs to be ensured and no loss of time should take place in implementation.

Earlier this week, National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), Ministry of Jal Shakti, taking serious note, took steps to alert district administrations and state governments. A direction and advisory was issued by DG, NMCG to District Magistrates who are also the chairperson of the District Ganga Committees on 11th May, 2021 followed up by a letter dated 12th May to the chief secretaries, to work towards prevention of dumping of dead bodies in the river and improve enforcement of the government guidelines on cremation of COVID-19 infected people. The letter also advised the states to support cremation, provide financial assistance as well as regulate the rates of the cremation/burial process and materials.

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