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Too early to claim, Yamuna has not improved much, say experts

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New Delhi: While Delhi government and the lieutenant governor are wrangling over who is responsible for the improvement in the quality of the Yamuna water, experts say that there is no substantial change in the water purity and it's too early to make any such claims.

While the LG's office claimed that its efforts had improved the biochemical oxygen level of the river after May last year, Delhi government swiftly responded that it was actually its 6-point Yamuna action plan that had led to the cleaner water.

The experts, however, pointed out that BOD is not the right parameter to assess river health since it fluctuates according to the season, periodic rain and the quantum of water volume in the river from time to time. "During summers, the BOD is always low because of the lesser volume of water in the river. During winters, it is the other way round with low demand for water. When it rains, the quality of water is also affected," explained an expert.

The area from where the sample of water is collected also makes a difference in the readings. "BOD is an inaccurate term to assess the health of a river or drain. Rather, the chemical oxygen demand



The authorities are trying to clean the Najafgarh drain

(COD) is a far more accurate indicator," the expert said. "Because BOD is not constant, over the period of time and along the length of the river, we get varied values of BOD. While BOD is the amount of oxygen required to oxidise the organic matter, COD is a measure of both organic and inorganic chemical compounds in the river, an indicator of pollution in the water.

Meanwhile, another expert pointed out that it is too early at the moment for anyone to claim that there has been an improvement in the water quality or if the drains have been cleaned. Until all the parameters are met along the stretch of the drains and river throughout the year, such a claim cannot be made,

too early to make any claims. There has actually been no genuine improvement in the river's health."

According to a statement from the LG's office, the BOD levels in the Najafgarh drain had improved by around 36% since May 2022. While the numbers are right, given that BOD in May 2022 was 76 mg/l against the standard of 30 mg/l, the same in May this year was 48 mg/l. However, this period was marred with multiple fluctuations in the BOD levels rather than showing a consistent improvement. There were also instances of surplus rain that affected the reading, such as March receiving 206% surplus rainfall, April, 23% and May, 262%.

Meanwhile, the river water test results showed it continued to be polluted. For the month of May, at its most polluted stretch in Delhi, the river had faecal coliform level of 4,00,000 most probable number (MPN) per 100 ml, which makes it 180 times more polluted than the standard and 800 times polluted than the desirable limit. These figures indicate the presence of untreated sewage.

Meanwhile, the dissolved oxygen level along the length of the river in Delhi was mostly nil to negligible and BOD at the best was 48 mg/l against the permissible limit of 3 mg/l or less.

AN EXPERT SAYS

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the expert said.

"The river Yamuna is still very much polluted," another expert, associated with the project to clear the river, declared. "Between last year and now, from May to May, there have been just two seasons of water readings, so it's

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Smart Housing Need of Hour for Sustainable Water Policy

POLICY PUNDIT

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Indian population is projected to keep rising until 2064, according to a latest United Nations report. The younger population is also giving momentum to mobility, which results in faster urbanisation. Therefore, urban stress for basic amenities may see a sharp jump, and water is expected to get scarce. This is a precious life support that will require preservation. The Central government recognised this need long ago, and has been running schemes for it.

The National Water Policy 2012 acted as a guideline for the state governments, as water is a state subject. After Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave high priority to water conservation efforts by constituting the Jal Shakti Ministry, there has been visible improvements.

Even the schemes for the rural areas, such as the Atal Bhujal Yojna, which is aimed at improving the water table in the arid districts, has delivered encouraging results. Since 2020, the Centre has substantially increased the fund allocation—10 times in three years. In 2020-21, ₹125 crore was allocated, and the scheme was provided with ₹1,170 crore in 2022-23. The fund utilisation has also been almost 100 percent under the scheme. Similarly, the PM announced a scheme called Amrit Sarovar, which called for the revival or restoration of 75 water bodies in each district of the country. It was recently announced that 50,000 ponds have so far been revived under the campaign. The intervention of the Central government along with seriousness being given to afforestation may give a major boost to preserve water resources in the country.

Serious thought though is

needed in places of high water-consumption regions such as urban centres. The National Water Policy mandates that water be used efficiently at such places. But it may be timely to revisit the efficacy of the policy guidelines and take stock of the ground situation. For instance, audit of water usage and recycling in group housing societies, hotels, hostels, hospitals, colleges, institutions, manufacturing units and other similar entities must be an integral part of the localised water policy. It's well known that such entities are water guzzlers. The policy must incorporate provision for at least 50 percent reuse of

become an institutionalised response to the water conservation efforts. In fact, as part of the localised water policy, such entities must also be mandated to conserve rain water. Town planning approvals and inspections should regularly seek compliances for zero slippages. Thus, high water-consuming entities can adopt self-sustainable models. Ensuring minimal water discharge in the sewage will take off much of the pressure from the already-stressed urban sewage system.

It also has to be stressed that the country cannot afford to fritter away gains made in the revival of the water bodies



water consumed by them, which needs to be measurable. There should be monthly audits and provisions for daily meter reading.

The National Water Policy has schemes of incentives to promote sustainable use of water. This can be further worked to encourage the efficient use of water. Residents who ensure 50 percent reuse can be given 50 percent rebate on water charges. Group housing societies and other such bodies may be mandated to ensure that another 50 percent used water after recycling goes for the efforts to recharge the ground water.

This can be part of a beginning which can

in the rural areas to irresponsible water usages in the urban centres. People have to know that water is a scarce resource, and an asset that needs replenishment.

Jal Shakti Abhiyan to promote people's participation for 'catch the rain where it falls and when it falls' has also given desired results. As many as 8,74,680 reuse and recharge structures have been created as part of the campaign so far in the water-stressed districts of the country. It's time we replicated the success of such campaigns at the urban centres by making high water-consuming entities equal stakeholders.

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