

## Godavari River Highly Polluted

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Two months since the Godavari was cleaned for the Kumbh Mela in Nashik, the river is back to being a murky nullah choked with garbage of all sorts—house-hold waste, plastic and puja material dumped into it during the recent festive period.

Residents have resumed washing clothes on the banks of the river, which has lost its usual placid flow after the Kumbh Mela, Navaratra, Diwali and the most-recent Chhath Puja. The new ghats, which were constructed for the 12-yearly religious congregation, have become dirty, a striking contrast to what it was a few months ago.

During the Kumbh Mela, water was released from the upstream dams to ensure that the river was periodically washed. But with scanty rain fall this monsoon and no water to release for maintaining the river's flow, it is unlikely that the Godavari will assume its pristine look before the onset of the next rainy season.

The Nashik Municipal Corporation (NMC) had put in months of hard work and planning to prepare the river ghats for the biggest religious congregation of the world, hosted in the city every 12 years. After the event, the civic body seems to have lost its diligence and vigour, with one major consequence: the Godavari has become a murky nullah with foam, filth, plastic, used puja material and other garbage swirling in it.

"Washing vehicles has reduced but solid waste disposal and washing of clothes continue to pollute the river. The tributaries, particularly Nasardi, Kapila and Waldevi are the worst polluted," said green activist Rajesh Pandit.

Even during the event, foam formation was seen on one side of the Sangam bridge, and filthy water from the Nasardi met the Godavari on the other side of the ghats. The NMC had installed a net on the view from the bridge to conceal the murky water from the view of the pilgrims. The net has been removed ever since.

During a hearing on the Godavari pollution, the Bombay High Court observed that the river had become dirty after the Mela, in response to a September 5 letter addressed by the executive engineer, irrigation division to the district collector, requesting him to release water from the Gangapur dam for cleaning and washing away the filth accumulated in the river during the Kumbh Mela.

But this year's scanty rain fall induced the Government

to redirect a major share of the dam waters to the parched Marathwada.

Based on the HC's directions and National Environmental Engineering Research Institute's (NEERI) recommendations, the NMC made some permanent and temporary arrangements to arrest the pollution during the Kumbh.

NEERI is now working on the problem in collaboration with IIT-Powai to bring down the bio-chemical oxygen demand (BOD) of the outlets of the sewage treatment plants (STPs). "The BOD of the STPs is in accordance with the specifications of the centre. But since the sewage water is not treated completely, NEERI suggested that it be brought down", said UB Pawar, the superintending engineer of the NMC's sewage department.

"The foam formation is our original problem but it is just an aesthetic issue. The increase in the foam formation is due to season change," he added. "The NMC put up boards all over the banks and bridges to prevent river pollution; has done phytoid treatment for water purification at Someshwar nullah; diverted the sewage released in the nullahs to the STP plants permanently; and in two places—Anandwalli and Lendi nullahs, temporary diversion has been done," Pawar said.

An official in the NMC's health department said the problem of unclean ghats would soon be solved as they sought the general body's approval for outsourcing the sanitation work to 700 people. "At present, we have only 40 sanitary workers in Ramkund and the surrounding areas. We have 1,500 sanitary employees and the requirement is 4,500," he said.

Maharashtra Pollution Control Board collected water samples from Ramkund, Tapovan, Takli Sangam and Dasak in Nashik & Kushawarth, Ahilya Sangam and Bada Udasin Akhada in Trimbakeshwar during Kumbh. BOD was found between 3 and 9 mg per litre on an average. Dissolved oxygen was found to be between 3 and 6 mg/litre on an average, recommended level is 5 mg/litre. NEERI director Rakesh kumar said the BOD should be below 3 mg/litre for bathing.

From December 6, 2012 till October 29, 2015, the Bombay HC issued several directions to curb river pollution. In its latest order after the Kumbh, the HC observed that the river has once again become dirty and appointed NEERI again to study and suggest long-term and immediate solutions to check the pollution of the river.