

Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu, Thiru. Banwarilal Purohit participated as Chief Guest and inaugurated the "Clean Cooum Campaign" organised by National Disaster Response Force

Thiru. Banwarilal Purohit, Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu participated as Chief Guest and inaugurated the "Clean Cooum Campaign" organised by National Disaster Response Force at Anna Auditorium, Chepauk, Chennai today (01.11.2019) and addressed the gathering.

Hon'ble Governor said, "I am delighted to be here this morning at the inauguration of the "Clean Cooum Campaign" being organised by the National Disaster Response Force.

The National Disaster Response Force which was conceived as a Multi Disciplinary, Multi skilled, specialist force capable of responding to natural calamities and for undertaking search and Rescue operations, Medical First Response in Chemical, Biological, Radiological and nuclear emergencies and Deep Diving Search & Rescue operations and other responses for disaster mitigation, was raised on 19 January 2006 with 8 battalions initially.

Today, the National Disaster Response Force consists of 12 battalions, three each from the Border Security Force (BSF) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and two each from Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB). Each battalion comprises of 1149 personnel and 18 self contained Search and rescue teams. The battalions are located at 12 different locations in the country based on the vulnerability profile and to cut down the response time for their deployment at sites of disaster. In addition, 23 Regional Response centres have also been established at important cities to ensure prompt response for disaster mitigation.

The nodal NDRF battalion i.e., the 04th Battalion with jurisdiction for the area comprising Tamilnadu, Kerala, Pondicherry, Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep & Minicoy Islands has its headquarters in Arakkonam. Over the years this battalion has played a stellar role in several disaster mitigation efforts. Their rescue operations in Tamilnadu such as during the Chennai Floods of 2015, the Vardha Cyclone of 2016, the Okhi Cyclone of 2017 and the Gaja Cyclone of 2018 have won them the appreciation of the common people. Nearly 80,000 people were rescued by the NDRF

in these operations thus establishing their importance and strategic role in times of emergency.

The NDRF has along displayed a high level of professionalism and a strong sense of responsibility and concern for public welfare. The Clean Cooum Campaign launched today is one another effort in this direction.

As you are all aware, the Cooum river is one of the rivers flowing through Chennai city and it drains into the Bay of Bengal. For centuries, the river has been an integral part of the socio-economic and cultural life of the city. Till the early twentieth century, it was a clean river, suitable for navigation. In fact, in ancient times, it played a pivotal part in the far-flung maritime trade between the Roman Empire and South India.

According to scientists, upto around 1950, Cooum had 49 species of fish, and by the late 1970s, this had come down to 21 species. At present there are no fish in the river, owing to the toxic pollutants found in the river water.

The 90s and the following decades saw much international debate & discussion on water pollution and water conservation. There were initiatives like the National Water Mission and National River Conservation Plan (NRCP) to clean the major rivers in our country. I am informed that the Cooum and Adyar were both covered under the National River Conservation Programme and that considerable funds were provided to the Chennai Metropolitan Sewerage Board in the past. While some efforts were undertaken the inability to arrest the sewage outfalls and the lack of a comprehensive plan to save the river resulted in the pollution levels in the river continuing unabated.

The 04th Battalion NDRF is now spearheading a campaign to clean the river Cooum at a number of locations along the river covering a length of 13 km. This cleanliness drive will initially take place at Koyambedu, Annanagar Causeway, Annanagar Skywalk, Nungambakkam, Spurtank Road, Albert theatre, Apollo hospital, Chinthadripet and near Napier Bridge. Around 1500 volunteers from various government and non-governmental organisations including the Central Industrial Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, Greater Chennai Corporation, Nehru Yuvak Kendra, National Cadet Corps and Indian Red Cross have joined hands to make this programme a success. Private institutions and hospitals are also joining in this effort. The NDRF is planning to carry out the cleaning twice a month for the next 3 to 4 months so that a significant contribution is made towards reducing the level of pollution in the Cooum river.

In this connection, I wish to quote the example of a River Conservation programme which has been successful.

Under the Namami Gange programme comprehensive interventions for tackling all sources of pollution for improvement of water quality have been taken up. Sustainability of these interventions has further been improved by adopting performance- based contracts for the works being undertaken. A total of 150 sewerage infrastructure projects at a cost of approximately Rs.23,130 crore have already been taken up for the Ganga and its tributaries.

This project is not limiting its efforts to only pollution abatement measures but has a comprehensive approach for river rejuvenation. Several steps have been taken towards improvement of flow and also for improving people-river connect by improving riverfronts in terms of approach, amenities and improved sanitation.

Rejuvenation of water bodies is an important part of improving the flow of the river. A specific project has also been sanctioned for rejuvenation of several kunds along the river stretch. An integrated management and rejuvenation effort for the urban wetlands is also being covered under the programme.

The River Basin Management Plan recognizes the importance of interplay between groundwater and surface water. In line with this a project has been taken up in collaboration with Central Ground Water Board and National Geophysical Research Institute for aquifer mapping with focus on paleo-channels in parts of Ganga-Yamuna doab in Kaushambi-Kanpur stretch.

The reuse and recycling of waste water is another important component of under which several initiatives have been taken up for encouraging projects for use of treated waste water from Sewage Treatment Plants for industrial use in Mathura Refinery and in the use in thermal power stations etc.

The above examples illustrate the manner in which river conservation can be undertaken in a comprehensive manner. I am sure that this cleaning campaign of the NDRF will spur on efforts to work out a comprehensive plan for the Cooum and Adyar rivers.

We must always remember that “Nature is not an inheritance from our ancestors but a borrowing made from succeeding generations”. It is our duty to preserve Nature and bequeath its resources to succeeding generations in the manner that is sustainable, by following an eco-friendly path. In this context, residents of

Chennai city have a responsibility to restore the Cooum and Adyar rivers to the environmental standards that prevailed in the 50s and 60s.

I wish to conclude by expressing my admiration for the work being done by the National Disaster Response Force, and convey my appreciation to all those who are participating in the Cooum Cleaning Campaign which is the need of the hour for Chennai city. I extend my best wishes and greetings to them and I am sure that they will be greeted with success in all their endeavours.”

On this occasion, Thiru. S.N. Pradhan, I.P.S., Director General, National Disaster Response Force, Thiru. Ashish Bhengra, I.P.S., DGP (Retd), State Disaster Response Force, Tamil Nadu, Ms. Rekha Nambiar, Commandant 04 Bn, National Disaster Response Force (A), Thiru. D. Suresh. Environmental Activist and addressed the gathering.

Raj Bhavan, Chennai -22

Sd/-

Date : 01.11.2019

Joint Director (PR)