NEWS AND NOTES

National River Policy – R. Vaidyanadhan, M.S. Rao and R.H. Sawkar, Geological Society of India, Bangalore (Email: gsocind@gmail.com)

A Group Discussion on “Rejuvenation of River Systems in South India” and “National River Policy” was held on the 2nd and 3rd August, 2013 at the Department of Mines and Geology, “Khanija Bhawan,” Race Course Road, Bengaluru - 560 001. This was sponsored by the Department of Water Resources of Karnataka State and conducted by the Geological Society of India, Bengaluru and Tarun Bharat Sangh/Jal Biradari.

R.H. Sawkar, Secretary, Geological Society of India, welcomed the gathering besides highlighting a couple of problems faced by the state in the augmentation of water resources for the increasing demand faced in parts of the state. Dr. Ashok Dalwai, DDG, UIDAI presided over the meeting. Dr. Rajendra Singh, General Secretary, Tarun Bharat Sangh, who is well known for his achievements in the field of restoration of defunct tanks and rejuvenation of some rivers in parts of Rajasthan, explained the need not only for the rejuvenation of some of the rivers in the country but also the formulation and enactment of a National River Policy even though there is already a National Water Policy. Justice Sri N. Santosh Hegde, Former Lokayukta, narrated instances of gradual extermination of a number of tanks/lakes in and around Bengaluru during the past half a century, besides advising the affected to approach the judiciary, whenever orders passed by them are not a carried out by designated/appropriate Government agencies or departments at the State or at the Centre. Prof. R. Vaidyanadhan spoke on the geomorphic history of some of the rivers of South India. Sri S.A. Char, Former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources at the Centre, in his address delved on his experiences in the rejuvenation of defunct tanks as well.

The second session in the afternoon was initially presided over by Capt. Raja Rao, Former Secretary of Water Resources, Govt. of Karnataka, and later by Justice Sri M.N. Venkatachala, Former Chief Justice of India. During this session, to start with, some chosen representatives from each of the states of South India (Dr. N.R. Ramesh, Andhra Pradesh; Dr. G. Bhaskaran, Tamil Nadu; Dr. S. Chattopadhyay, Kerala; Sri Y.N. Yellapa Reddy, Karnataka and Miss Pallavi Kulkarni, Maharashtra) described the nature of the rivers in their respective states, the data that is available on them and the problems being faced due to misuse/exploitation of the rivers. Draft of the National River Policy produced by the Tarun Bharath Singh and Peoples’ Policy in River, River Basin and River Rejuvenation for Kerala by Sri S.P. Ravi, an Activist from Kerala, were perused through by all the participants (over 60 present on the occasion, coming from different parts of South India) and they presented their views on these drafts and also their own experiences. Capt. Raja Rao cautioned against infringing on the already existing sections of National Water Policy and Justice Sri Venkatachala enumerated a number of instances of injustice made to men and society by irresponsible authorities and appreciated the efforts being taken now. The above documents were printed and circulated by the Geological Society of India to all the participants.

On the 3rd August Dr. Ashok Dalwai, DDG, UIDAI presided over both the morning and evening sessions. The discussion over the drafts and further presentations continued and four groups of members were formed from the states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka and they were requested to discuss with other stakeholders in their respective states the drafts and modify, wherever need be, taking into consideration the special problems they are facing and prepare a document to be ultimately presented to the concerned Departments of the state for their opinion and take further action and enact suitable legislation for proper implementation for the rejuvenation of the rivers in particular and lakes and tanks as well.

Dr. Dalwai summed up briefly the important points made in the presentations and re-emphasized that there is bound to be some differences in the State River Policies taking local conditions and requirements into consideration.

Sri Rajendra Singh suggested convening meetings in the capitals of the states or any other place in the following months and finalise the drafts of the states before presenting the same at a National Convention planned to be held on the 19th November, 2013 at Delhi.

This exercise is a very important step taken by the individuals and representatives of public-spirited private organizations (like NGOs of various denominations), but with the sole objective to rejuvenate our rivers from complete extinction so that any common man must have access to the rivers, which is held very highly in Indian ethos. It is hoped that before long some concrete action will be initiated by the powers that be at the respective states and the Centre to achieve the objectives mentioned.