

AUM LAI Holds River Basin-Water Resources Conference

A most successful conference was held on June 28 2019, at Lonavala, Maharashtra, India to discuss issues and approaches to addressing the plight of India's rivers and the increasingly severe problems regarding water conservation within that nation.



Water conservation has become an urgent necessity in the face of uneven monsoons and climate change-induced extreme weather. Indeed, the Times of India recently reported that Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday, June 30, called for a national effort to protect and augment India's water resources. June ended with a monsoon deficit of 33%, resulting in the 5th worst deficit in June rainfall in 100 years. This deficit is country-wide. Further, given high levels of river water pollution and water management issues it appears that only about 8% of water received from rainfall is being utilized.

Modi Govt among other things is reaching out to NGO's and organizations like LAI to encourage its members to address this issue. As reported by the Times, in its July 1st Pune edition, the Prime Minister was quoted as saying "Come, let us join water conservation and involve ourselves in making a list of more and more innovative methods to motivate people to conserve water..."



AUM LAI has taken this challenge to heart, by organizing this one day conference entitled *River Basin-Water Resources, Facilitating Global Outreach to Revive Rivers and River Management* held June 28, 2019 at the Hotel Fariyas, Lonavala, and Maharashtra. Over 150 people attended this meeting conducted in collaboration with Dr Rajendra Jagdale, Science and Technology Park, Pune and co-hosted by the Mr KP Bakshi, Chairman, Maharashtra Water Resources Regulating Authority, the Agricultural Development Trust, Baramati and the Lonavala Municipal Council.



The meeting was keynoted by Mr Anilkumar Hatkar MLAI, President AUM LAI. Hatkar drove home the issue of water scarcity, water management and pollution controls. He stated that there is no challenge greater than assuring the provision of clean, available and affordable water to (India's) population. He was followed by Les Pollock FAICP, FLAI of the Ely Chapter, Chicago, USA, and Chair of the LAI Global Chapter who argued for better land use control and urban housekeeping of the public realm to minimize river pollution, and presented a series of examples from the US regarding river edge management.

A highlight of the conference was the appearance and presentation of Hon. Padma Vibhushan, Shri, Sharadchandraji Pawar the ex-minister for Defence & Agriculture, for central Govt

and ex-Chief Minister, Maharashtra, a revered figure in Indian politics who stressed the need for better river management and overall water conservation.

A series of Plenary Sessions then followed addressing the need for holistic master planning for water resources in the Bhima River Basin, which serves 14 urban communities including the city of Pune, (pop. approximately six million) moderated by Dr Dilip Boralkar, ex Member Secretary MPCP, the restoration and management of quality water, moderated by Mr. Jagdish Joshi, IAS Ex Additional Chief Secretary, ably assisted by senior most retired bureaucrats, Mr V Deshpande ,Ex Director Town Planning Govt of Maharashtra, Mr V N Ranade, Mr Satish Bhingare and Prof More and DR Rajendra Jagdale, Aum Chapter member Dr Rajesh Biniwale, NIRI, and Inter Basin Water Transfer for Equitable Allocation moderated by Rajiv Mishra MLAI, Head, JJ College of Architecture, Mumbai. Almost fifteen not for profit organizations working actively in the relevant field along with the Rajendra Pawar, Water Resources Dept, Govt of Maharashtra.

The conference was blessed by Hon Mr Girish Mahajan, Minister for Water Resources, Govt of Maharashtra.

The scope and direction of the meeting was summed up historian and Adv. Rabindra Hazari, Aum Chapter member. Mr. Hazari noted the importance and utility of LAI in presenting this conference and facilitating the necessary dialogue to address these key issues. He stated that the conduct of this conference reflects LAI's goals to encourage discussion among regional leaders on this subject.

Mr. Hazari noted that river basins have historically nurtured human life and civilization, and that we have always struggled to maintain our rivers. Questions that we raised at the conference are questions of many civilizations, and include that of national conflict over river waters as they flow through nations and the more local issue of striking a balance between the provision of water to those living and farming upriver vs. downriver. As evidenced by this discussion, we still lack the tools to meter water and identify how it can be distributed fairly. Thus, the challenge of how to fairly and efficiently share our water resources remains a continuing local, regional and national issue. The Aum-LAI Chapter assured the Govt to help assist in their endeavor.




