

GREEN CRUSADER MANOJ MISRA DIES, JAIRAM RAMESH HAILS HIS CONTRIBUTION

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Renowned environmental activist and former Indian Forest Service officer Manoj Misra breathed his last at 12.40 pm on Sunday, leaving behind a legacy of battles fought to safeguard precious forests and rivers. He was 68.

Misra, who tested positive for COVID-19 on April 8, was undergoing treatment since April 10. The conservation community, including members of the Indian Forest Service fraternity, mourned his passing and hailed his tireless efforts to safeguard forests and rivers.

Born in Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, Misra's early life was shaped by his love for nature and the environment. He pursued his education from Pant Nagar University in Uttarakhand and later at Allahabad University.

In 1979, he joined the Indian Forest Service, joining the Madhya Pradesh cadre. He served in various capacities in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh before opting for voluntary retirement in 2001.

In 2007, he founded the Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan, a movement dedicated to the revival of the river. While pollution in the Yamuna had become a national concern in 1994, it was Misra's leadership that brought the river into the spotlight.

Known for his humility, Misra actively fought against deforestation, illegal mining and pollution using legal avenues to protect natural resources. His legal battles to save forests and rivers gained widespread recognition.

Misra fought numerous legal battles to protect the Yamuna and its floodplains, taking a stand against the construction of a metro depot (2007), a Millennium Bus depot (2011), dumping of construction debris (2012), covering of stormwater drains (2013), pollution of the Hindon river (2014), construction of an elevated road without environmental study (2015) and a cultural festival organised by the Art of Living (March 2016).

The efforts of Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan, spearheaded by Misra, led to the National Green Tribunal calling for the phased rejuvenation of the river in 2015.

Until his hospitalisation, Misra continued to fight for the preservation of the Yamuna and its

floodplains. In April, he wrote to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, seeking action against an illegal cricket ground and academy operating on the floodplains near the DND flyway.

Misra's relentless efforts to protect the river and its floodplains have had a profound impact.

According to Sudha, a member of the Yamuna Jiye Abhiyan, "Had it not been for sir (Misra), the floodplain that we are seeing today in Delhi would not exist. Concrete infrastructure, including helipads and five-star hotels, would have come up on the site." Misra's passing leaves a void in the environmental conservation movement as he was regarded as a one-man army in the fight to safeguard the Yamuna river. His dedication and unwavering commitment to the cause serves as an inspiration to all who strive for a greener and more sustainable future, she added.

His death came as a large number of people gathered along the Yamuna riverbank to form a human chain under a citizen-centric initiative to save the river from pollution.

Under the 'Yamuna Sansad' initiative, people formed human chains at many places to demand the revival of the river overburdened by sewage and industrial waste. As news of his passing spread, tributes poured in from environmentalists, colleagues and admirers, acknowledging the significant contributions Misra made throughout his life.

"His unwavering determination to protect the environment and his instrumental role in preserving the Yamuna river and its floodplains will be remembered as a lasting legacy. He took me under his fold. He was like my father. I am saddened that he could not see a 'nirmal' Yamuna during his lifetime," said Bhim Singh, a member of the South Asia Network on Rivers, Dams and People -- an informal network working on issues related to rivers, communities and large-scale water infrastructure such as dams.

Congress leader and former Union environment minister Jairam Ramesh expressed sadness at Misra's death and said, "Deeply distressed to learn of the passing away of Manoj Misra, an indefatigable environmentalist. He was particularly passionate about the protection of rivers and spent much of his time on the revival of the Yamuna.

"He helped me in the drafting the first set of rules for River Regulation Zone, much along the lines of the Coastal Regulation Zone rules. Sadly, we still don't have enforceable RRZ rules." said Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena, who heads the the National Green Tribunal's high-level committee set up recently to monitor works to rejuvenate the Yamuna. He expressed his shock and pain at Misra's "untimely demise".

"He remained a warrior for the cause of the environment and a son of the river Yamuna, consistently striving for her revival. His passing away leaves us bereft of a valuable fellow traveler on the path of rejuvenating the Yamuna," Saxena said on Twitter.

Environmentalism Sunita Narain said on Twitter, "What sad news. Remarkable fighter for rivers and all things right. Huge loss. This world environment day will be much poorer without Manoj." World Environment Day, which is observed on June 5, encourages awareness and action for the protection of the environment.

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