



India led Global River Cities Alliance launched at CoP 28- A Pioneering Global initiative for Urban River Conservation and Sustainable River-centric Development

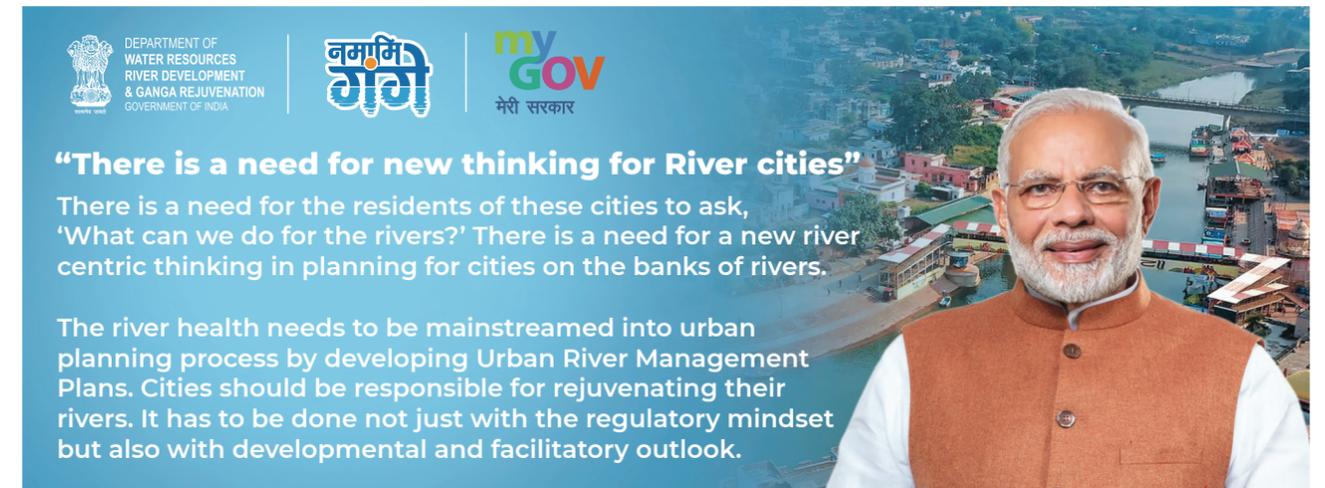
By: G Asok Kumar

The Global River Cities Alliance (GRCA), led by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) under the Ministry of Jal Shakti, Republic of India, was launched on December 10, 2023, at COP28 of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The GRCA expands upon the reach of the existing River Cities Alliance (RCA), formed by NMCG in association with the National Institute of Urban Affairs in 2021. The RCA has 142 Indian river cities as members, along with the city of Aarhus in Denmark. The new global group is a partnership with representatives from India, Egypt, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ghana, Australia, Bhutan, Cambodia, Japan and river cities such as Adelaide in Australia, The Hague (Den Haag) in the Netherlands, Szolnok in Hungary and international funding agencies the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and knowledge management institutions such as KPMG.

Earlier on December 6, 2023, a Memorandum of Common Purpose (MOCP) was signed between the RCA and the Mississippi River Towns and Cities initiative, representing 124 member river cities of the United States. With this launch, the GRCA has become a unique alliance, a first of its kind in the world, covering 275-plus global river cities in 11 countries, international funding agencies and knowledge management partners.

With rapid urbanization underway worldwide, the climate crisis and its impact on urban areas are patently manifested. The GRCA is “envisaged as a global partnership of national governments and their respective river cities, United Nations agencies and their programs, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, the private sector, academic and knowledge institutions that aim to promote the sustainable management of global urban rivers.”

The GRCA will focus on sustainable river management with an emphasis on reducing liquid and solid waste dumping in rivers by cities. It promotes the “Catch the Rain” concept to maximize rainwater harvesting and conserving urban lakes to address water shortages, abatement of urban floods (making room for rivers) and other climate change-related impacts. The GRCA advocates for the conservation of water bodies, pollution abatement and conservation of rivers in urban areas, and giving water and rivers their place in urban planning as engines for tourism (river cruises) and economic growth. Incidentally, this also improves a city’s aesthetics, people’s health, the real-estate values of riverfront property and, in turn, tax revenue to urban local bodies. Current investment levels in urban infrastructure and services fall short of estimated needs, so the GRCA would support bringing climate-friendly urban investment opportunities for river cities.



The GRCA has several expected outcomes. They include understanding global best practices and knowledge exchange towards climate-resilient river cities. In addition, it will establish a global city-to-city peer learning platform and improve knowledge by sharing best practices and expertise through online dialogues, webinars, training programs, exposure visits and technology transfers. A dedicated platform and one-stop shop will be created for development agencies seeking opportunities for cooperation on aspects related to river-centric development. Finally, it will create opportunities for international private-sector solution providers working in global river cities to engage through the GRCA platform.

In the last two years of its existence, the RCA developed the Urban River Management Plan (URMP) framework that aims to preserve the wholesomeness of rivers by developing



a dedicated strategy for managing rivers within a city. The framework builds upon the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals and addresses environmental, social and economic elements conjunctively towards the river-centric development of cities and will be shared among all member cities.

Union Minister for Jal Shakti Gajendra Singh Shekhawat joined the event virtually. Other dignitaries present at the ceremony included Mark Harbers (Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management, the Netherlands), Prof. Hani Swilam (Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Egypt), Shri Sadhguru (Isha Foundation), Shri G. Asok Kumar, Special Secretary and Director-General, the NMCG), Ole Thonke (Denmark), Chuop Paris (Cambodia), Takahiro Konami (Japan), Karma Tshering (Bhutan), Karlene Maywald (Australia), Ing Godfred Fiifi Boadi (Ghana), Roos Meilink (Den Haag, the Netherlands), Erwin De Nys (World Bank), Satoshi Ishii (ADB), Ankur Agrawal (AIIB) and Sumouleendra Ghosh (KPMG).

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has been launching groundbreaking initiatives in many sectors, including the water and sanitation sector during the last nine years. It started with the world’s largest sanitation intervention by the Swachh Bharat Mission, in which 100 million toilets in rural areas and 6

million in urban areas were built during 2014 – 2019. That was followed by Namami Gange in 2014 to clean and rejuvenate the holy Ganga River, the program that has become one of the top 10 World Restoration Flagships. The Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and smart cities projects began in 2015 to improve the urban water sector. The Ministry of Jal Shakti was founded in 2019, along with the launch of the Jal Jeevan Mission, to provide functional tap-water connections to every rural household. In 2021, the “Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain” campaign began, along with the enactment of the Dam Safety Act. These are pioneering initiatives in the water sector.

Prime Minister Modi has been emphasizing “the need for a new river-centric thinking in planning for cities on the banks of rivers. The need for mainstreaming river health into the urban planning process by developing urban river management plans, and the responsibility of respective city councils in rejuvenating rivers, should be done not just with the regulatory mindset, but with a development and facilitatory outlook.” This led to the formation of the RCA in India in 2021, and now the GRCA.

The launch of the GRCA signifies a momentous step in global efforts toward river conservation and sustainable water management.