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## Swiss adventurer, crew to highlight condition of Ganges

**New Delhi, Sep 10 : The Ganga river, often called India's cultural and spiritual lifeline, will open up its thousand-year-old channel to a 2,500-km Ganga expedition led by renowned Swiss adventurer Andy Leeman Sep 14.**

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Leeman and his crew will draw attention to the condition of the river in context of global warming, receding glaciers, pollution and sustainable development of life along its banks and eco-tourism.

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The crew will include climatologist Mohan Munasinghe of the Green Cross International, who shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for his work on global warming and sustainable development as the vice-chairman of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and several professional photographers, docu-filmmakers and scientists.

Announcing the expedition, of the biggest of its kind, in the capital, Mohan Munasinghe said the expedition will help raise scientific awareness about the impact that climate change will have on the river.

'Coping with the water stress will be a central challenge in the years to come,' he told the media in the capital Thursday.

The 35-day expedition will begin at the source of the river at Gangotri, in the foothills of the Himalayas above Hardwar, and end Oct 19 near Kolkata where the river fans out into a delta to merge with the sea.

Munasinghe said seven of the world's largest rivers, including the Ganga, the Yamuna and Yangtze in China, originate in the Himalayas, supplying water to nearly 40 percent of the world's population.

The Ganga expedition is part of a project called, 'Rib Expedition & Adventure' in partnership with Kuoni (Travel) Group, Green Cross International and AB Inflatables. It will be supported by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), CPN Satellite ServicesPennel, Tag

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Heuer and Yatch Centre.

A Swiss non-profit centre, myclimate, 'has offsetted all carbon emissions caused by travel before, after and during the expedition,' the organisers said.

The funds from the carbon offsets will be channeled into an eco-friendly waste recycling project at Bali in Indonesia by Kuoni and myclimate.

'The expedition will draw attention to the environmental threats around the river, the cultural diversity and livelihoods along its banks, suggesting sustainable ways to develop them,' Swiss expedition leader Andy Leeman said.

The small shallow inflatables boats that will be used by the crew to navigate the narrow upper course, the clogged and shallow middle course and the deltaic lower course will be supplied by AB Inflatables, Leeman said.

Leeman, an adventurer and environmentalist, has travelled '4,000-km down the Mekong in China highlighting its pollution and threatened livelihoods along its banks, across six countries for three months down the Zambesi river in South Africa, and through the entire course of Amazonas (the Portuguese name for the Amazon) river in Brazil'.

'I was going through a study which said the Ganga may not continue to exist after 60 years. I want to highlight its condition and want people to use the river as a channel of transport,' Leeman told IANS.


'In the heartland of Africa, two million people die every year of malaria because the roads are blocked during the rainy season. African rivers are infested with crocodiles and are not always safe to travel in, but Indian rivers are safer. There are several trading points and large towns along the river. Using the river as a means of public transport will ensure its survival,' the river expedition expert said, comparing the Zambesi and the Ganga.

The crew will document the journey on video and collect information about the climatic impact and endangered livelihoods along its bank. The video documentary will be screened at the Copenhagen Climate Summit, CEO of Green Cross Adam Koniuszewski said.

'We want to highlight the Ganga as a sustainable river tourism option. India is an important destination for Kuoni and we want to help preserve the bio-diversity along its river banks,' said Matthias Leisinger, head of the corporate responsibility for the Kuoni Group.

The Ganga, India's national river, and its tributaries spread across 1000,000 square-km fertile basin that supports one of the world's highest density of population. The average depth of the river is 52 ft. It is 2,510 km long. Studies cite that pollution in the Ganga affects nearly 400 million people along its banks.

--IANS

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