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College to 'infuse life' in river

Andrew W. Lyngdoh

Shillong, Aug. 9: Named after the Umshyrpi river, Umshyrpi College will start "infusing life" into the water body which looks no better than a massive drain.

For long, the Umshyrpi, which flows through the city, has not only been dwindling in size, because of apparent encroachment, but the river has turned into a drain where effluents are released.

But the college wants to revive the river's life by involving its students, schools and the community.

As part of the process of "infusing life" into the Umshyrpi, the college students will be imparted training on bio-monitoring by Sonali Saha, an ecologist from Miami, Florida. Saha is working on capacity building of college students and communities for conservation of freshwater ecosystems in Meghalaya, with support from The Rufford Foundation, UK.

Delivering a talk at the college today during a seminar, Saha said bio-monitoring is an evaluation of the condition of a water body using biological surveys and other direct measurements of the resident biota in surface waters.

She said bio-monitoring of the Umshyrpi river involves collection of data, analysing it and to present the same to India Biodiversity portal, pollution control board and local communities.

The systematic data, she said, would lead to making "informed decisions". She also stressed the need to build technological capacity, use of open source Geographic

Information System, and automated sensors for monitoring parameters remotely.

Giving a brief profile of the river, college lecturer K.B. Nongrum said the Umshyrpi, which means "water for you all", has its main source at Shillong Peak. The river flows through the entire greater Laban and flows towards Sonapani. The Umshyrpi meets the Umkhrah to form the Wah Roro just before emptying into the Umiam river.

Stating that the college would create awareness among traditional institutions, administrative authorities, students and others on the need to rejuvenate the Umshyrpi, Nongrum said the college's bio-monitoring team would try to infuse life into the river.

Environmentalist Naba Bhattacharjee said the rejuvenation campaign should first begin from "our own homes".

Bhattacharjee, who had filed petitions before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to save the Umkhrah and the Umshyrpi, said while commitment and passion were required for rejuvenating the rivers, results would not be delivered "overnight".

Former Shillong Municipal Board chief executive officer A.H. Scott Lyngdoh stressed the need to revamp the entire drainage system of the city.

"The problem (of cleaning up the rivers) is not being solved. We are yet to come to certain decisions. But we have to be clear on how to go about this job," Lyngdoh, who is also a former Meghalaya minister, said.

Umshyrpi College president and former minister Sayeedullah Nongrum recalled with nostalgia the "clean" Umshyrpi where angling and swimming were regular features. "But now, we are not even able to touch the water of the river," he lamented.