

# Environmental Issues of South & East Asia

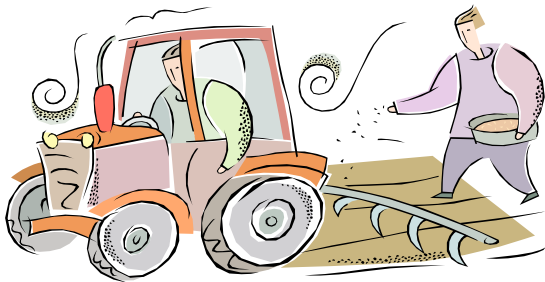
## Water Pollution

The **Ganges River** in India and the **Yangtze River** in China are two heavily polluted rivers in Asia. These rivers have become extremely polluted over the last few decades as the populations along them have increased. As cities along the rivers grow, the waste along them increases as well. Humans, animals, and factories are all polluting the rivers, leading to disastrous effects for those who depend upon them.

**GANGES RIVER** The Ganges River begins high in the Himalayan Mountains and flows 1,600 miles through India and Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal. The river provides transportation and drinking water to 400 million people who live in the river valley. The Ganges is also considered holy to Hindus in India. Many Hindus believe life is incomplete without bathing in Ganges at least once in their lives. They believe that the water from the Ganges can cleanse a person's soul of all past sins and also cure illnesses.



In spite of the Ganges' importance and its place in the spiritual lives of Indians, the quality of the water has become poor. Chemicals used in fertilizers, pesticides, and industry are washed into the river every day. Human and animal waste also pollutes the river. The bodies of dead animals as well as the cremated remains of human beings (*bodies that are burned after death and whose ashes are scattered in the river*) regularly float down the river too. In spite of this, many Indians still bath in the Ganges and use it for water for drinking and cooking.



Cities along the Ganges have the highest rates of waterborne diseases (*diseases found in drinking water*) of any who live in India. Outbreaks of such diseases as cholera, dysentery, typhoid, and hepatitis are common. Still, these cities pour millions of gallons of sewage (*water that contains waste products*) and industrial chemicals into the river which is then carried to cities and villages farther downstream.

**YANGTZE RIVER** China's longest river, the Yangtze River, flows almost 4,000 miles from the northwestern part of the country to the East China Sea. The Yangtze River passes through 185 towns where almost 400 million people live. Pumping stations along the river take water out to supply people with water for drinking, irrigation, and industrial uses. Millions of gallons of sewage are dumped into the river along with chemicals from agricultural runoff and industrial wastes. Nitrogen from fertilizers and arsenic (*a poisonous chemical*) from industry are leading pollutants found in the Yangtze's waters.

The pollution in the river puts all of the cities along its banks at risk. Many species of plants and animals that once lived in the river are disappearing. A high level of chemicals in the water has led to reduced oxygen in the water causing fish to die. Still these fish, which are often contaminated, are eaten by the Chinese people and lead to other health problems.

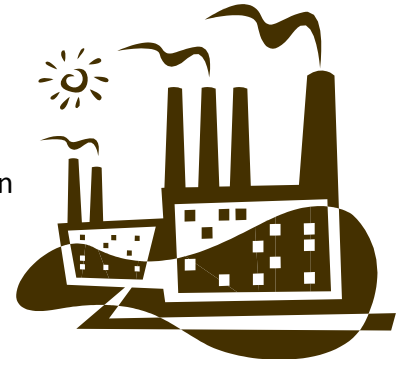


Both countries, India and China, are trying to solve their water pollution problems. India has built many sewage and water treatment plants (*plants that remove pollution from wastewater*) along the Ganges, but overpopulation and continued pollution has meant that clean-up efforts have fallen short of what is needed. China has also built water treatment plants along the Yangtze and

encouraged cities to build sanitary landfills where waste would be safely isolated from the environment. However like India, growing population, industry, and construction has lead to more and more pollution for the people who live along the Yangtze River.

## Air Pollution

Air pollution is another serious problem in India and China. In both countries, an enormous and still growing population has lead to a rapid growth of cities. Along with the growing cities, industry (*factories*) has also developed at a fast rate. Both of these factors have lead to China and India having some of the most heavily polluted air in the world.



When cities begin to grow, more cars and trucks begin polluting the air with carbon dioxide and other chemicals. It is estimated that over 70 percent of India's air pollution is caused by automobiles. China has the same problem. Industrial smoke from factories also contributes heavily to the air pollution in both countries. Despite their efforts, the governments of India and China have been largely unsuccessful in enforcing environmental laws meant to reduce air pollution.

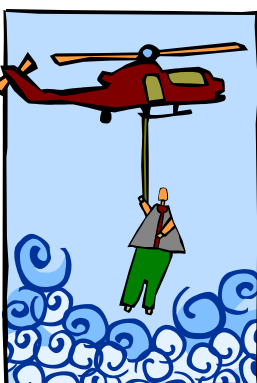


Air pollution has many terrible effects on the environment and the people. In India, **brown clouds** of smog are developing throughout the country. In China, **acid rain** has begun to fall throughout the country. Acid rain is harmful to the environment – killing plants and animals, damaging soil, and eroding buildings. Air pollution has also lead to some of the highest rates of respiratory (*lung/breathing*) diseases in the world. Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of people die each year as a result of the air pollution in these two countries.

It has been difficult for both India and China to improve their air quality. As they develop at a rapid rate, they do not want to slow down economic growth. This is because many people are poor in both countries, and they are reluctant to exchange their better economy for less air pollution. However, efforts are being made to enforce laws that would reduce the deadly car and factory emissions polluting the air.

## Flooding

Flooding occurs yearly on India's Ganges River and China's Huang He (*Yellow River*) and Yangtze River. Flooding negatively affects the economy, the environment, and humans. It destroys homes and businesses, leading to billions of dollars of repairs. For example, in 1998 flood in China caused \$156 billion of damage. Flooding also harms the environment. Trash and sewage are washed into the rivers. Rising, rushing waters destroy acres of farmland, leading to



less food for the people of these countries. Human beings are severely affected by floods as well. Not only do thousands of people caught in flood waters and drown every year, but homes and farms are lost as well. Recently, the Indus River flooded in Pakistan and 17 million people were killed, injured, or forced to move from their homes. Floods also kill people by spreading diseases like pneumonia, malaria, dysentery, and influenza (*the flu*). Flooding of rivers is a critical issue leading to many different problems for the people and governments of Asia each year.