

Perilous Play: Children Risk Lives Near Swollen Ghaggar Despite Warnings and Fines



Despite explicit warnings from local authorities and the threat of a ₹2,000 fine, children are routinely seen venturing dangerously close to the swollen Ghaggar River in Panchkula. This alarming trend, observed by a Times of India team on Monday, July 21, 2025, highlights a serious public safety concern, especially as the monsoon season brings increased water levels and stronger currents to the seasonal river.

The Ghaggar, notorious for its rapid water level fluctuations during monsoons, has a history of claiming lives. Since 2013, at least 20 individuals have drowned or been swept away by the river's treacherous currents, including two teenagers in May alone. With the monsoon's arrival, the river transforms into a fast-flowing, dangerous waterway, yet children, primarily from nearby labor camps and shanties, are frequently spotted bathing or searching for valuables washed ashore.

Panchkula police have issued advisories urging residents to steer clear of the riverbanks, and Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) has been imposed by the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Surinder Pal Singh. This order, in effect until September 30, prohibits people from approaching within 20 meters of the banks of the Ghaggar and 13 other swollen rivers, rivulets, and dams in the district. Violators are liable to be booked under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for defying public orders, which carries a penalty of ₹2,000.

Despite these measures, the warnings often go unheeded. "It's mostly children of laborers from nearby shanties who go to the river. Most of them do not go to school. So when their parents go to work, they come here," stated Tapasya Sharma, co-founder of the "Save Ghaggar" campaign.

The absence of consistent police patrols to enforce the ban near vulnerable spots exacerbates the problem, allowing this dangerous behavior to persist.

The rapid and powerful current of the swollen Ghaggar can easily sweep away anyone who enters its waters, regardless of age or swimming ability. Beyond the immediate threat of drowning, the river's water is often contaminated with industrial effluents and municipal waste, posing severe health risks from waterborne diseases. Studies have even linked heavy metal pollution in the Ghaggar basin to increased instances of cancer, particularly in children, underscoring the unseen dangers lurking beneath the surface.

As the monsoon season continues, the district administration faces a critical challenge in ensuring public safety around the Ghaggar. Enhanced enforcement, coupled with sustained awareness campaigns, particularly targeting vulnerable communities, is vital. Placing clear, prominent warning signs and ensuring regular patrolling at high-risk points could serve as immediate deterrents, potentially preventing further tragedies and safeguarding the lives of those who, oblivious to the peril, venture too close to the river's edge.