

## River march to save the Luni

Special Correspondent

*Waterman Rajendra Singh will lead the yatra from Barmer to Pali*

JAIPUR: Water activists have decided to take up the cause of the Luni, the desert river and the only flowing water source in western parts of Rajasthan, after almost two decades of efforts by disparate victims of pollution proving unsuccessful in salvaging it. Leading the groups this time is Waterman Rajendra Singh, the Magsaysay Award winner who has announced a "yatra" from Balotra in Barmer district to the district town of Pali from February 11.

"The condition of the Luni is getting worse with the textile units near Pali town continuing to drain out their effluents to the river. The past interventions, including directives from the Supreme Court, have not deterred the polluters," Mr. Singh said announcing the "river march" here on Saturday.

"Our attempt is to put moral pressure on the Government to protect the river," he said. "Over the past 19 years many, including well known persons, tried to stop pollution of the Luni but nothing worked. The river is not perennial but it is of great significance to the desert dwellers," Mr. Singh said.

### Farmers agitated

The Jal Bhagirathi Foundation, headed by the former ruler of Jodhpur, Gaj Singh, and Jal Biradari (Water community), headed by Rajendra Singh, are campaigning for the river along with local farmers. The Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), which has been fighting to stop pollution of the Luni for several years, has also been invited to join. "The farmers in the region are agitated over the damage caused to thousands of acres of land in the region due to the textile colouring agents drained out into the river," said Prithviraj Singh, managing trustee of the Jal Bhagirathi Foundation. The Foundation was spurred to act after the Sangarsh Samiti (struggle committee) of the local farmers approached it for support, he noted.

The Luni, also called the Salt River by the academics going by the salt content in its waters, is referred to as Bandi river at Pali. Originating from the Aravalli hill system in Pushkar in Ajmer district, the Luni finally drains out in to the Rann of Kutch while some of its tributaries also flow down to Pakistan.

The "River March" along the course of the Luni forms part of the nation-wide movement launched by the Jal Biradari this year to create public opinion on the health of the nation's rivers. In a resolution taken at Dev Ka Devra, a little village on the banks of the Arvari — the river brought back to life by Mr. Singh with the support of the local community — on December 28, the year 2008 has been declared as the year of "Nadi Sanrakshan Satyagraha" (the River Protection Satyagraha).

"Under the campaign we have chosen one river, possibly near the State capital, to highlight. In the case of Rajasthan it is a river in Marwar (west Rajasthan) while in Tamil Nadu it is the Cooum (the Adyar river) and in Bihar it is the Kosi. The Ganga and the Yamuna are already in the list along with 14 tributaries of these rivers including Mandakini, Alaknanda and Mahanadi," said M. S. Rathore, programme coordinator and professor with the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur.