



## Save Ganga!

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VARANASI: Magsaysay Award winner Rajendra Singh, popularly known as Waterman of India, welcomed the approach of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh regarding the conservation of rivers. "The PM's view is exactly the same for what we have been struggling," Singh told TOI over phone on Tuesday while returning from Kolkata after holding a three-day camp Ganga Azadi Shibir from August 15 to 17.

It may be mentioned that the PM while addressing the National Conference of Ministers of Environment and Forests in New Delhi on Tuesday said that the government had decided to adopt a different and more holistic approach towards the holy river. The essence of this approach is not just to focus on river pollution but more comprehensively on catchment area treatment, protection of flood plains, ensuring ecological flows and restoration of the river ecosystem, said the PM in his address. It has been decided to take the river and not the city as the unit of planning as done until now.

Expressing his concern over the degradation of rivers, the PM said that the government has substantially increased the allocation for river conservation programme in this year's budget, including a special provision of Rs 250 crore for the Ganga. The PM also exhorted the states to explore mobilising additional resources for river cleaning through innovative models like Special Purpose Vehicles, and effectively enforce legal provisions through State Pollution Control Boards to curtail the discharge of untreated industrial effluents into the rivers.

"We appreciate this approach and hope that it would be taken to the implementation level," said Singh adding that only free flowing rivers in their natural form can save mankind. Singh launched a movement for the independence of Ganga and all other rivers from August 15 by holding a camp in Kolkata. According to him, similar camps would be held by the Jal Biradari in various parts of India to mobilise people's sentiment towards the importance of rivers.

At local level the Ganga Seva Abhiyan (GSA) held Ganga-Tiranga programme on the occasion of Independence Day in Varanasi and other towns for the cause of the Ganga. According to Swami Avimuktेश्वaranand Saraswati, the convener of GSA and disciple of Shankaracharya Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati, the organisation aims at arousing people's emotions to save Ganga from encroachment and pollution. The seers played an important role in the declaration of Ganga as National River, after which the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA) was established as an empowered body under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

It may be mention here that noted environmentalist GD Agrawal associating himself with the GSA had announced a fast-unto-death stir at Kedar Ghat here from the auspicious day of Shrawan Purnima (August 5) for saving Bhagirathi Ganga and restoration of its original and natural flow. But, on the request of local citizens, Ganga activists and Swami, he postponed his programme for one month. Agrawal's demand is to stop the works on the Bhairon Ghati, Pala-Maneri, and Loharinag-Pala hydropower projects (HPPs) on the Bhagirathi Ganga.