

Manmohan turns down Waterman's resignation from Ganga Authority

Special Correspondent

PMO holds talks with Magsaysay Award winner Rajendra Singh



Waterman responds positively, though with conditions. He will go to Varanasi to persuade G. D. Agarwal to end his fast.

The Prime Minister's Office has asked Magsaysay Award winner Rajendra Singh – better known as Waterman -- to reconsider his resignation from the National Ganga River Basin Authority.

Mr. Singh and his Authority colleagues Ravi Chopra and R. H. Siddiqi had quit two days ago in protest against alleged indifference of the Central Government towards protection of the Ganga river.

Mr. Singh has responded positively, though with conditions.

He is likely to reach New Delhi on Tuesday to join a team of government representatives who will travel to Varanasi to persuade former Indian Institute of Technology professor and environmental scientist G. D. Agarwal to end his fast.

Dr. Singh heads the Ganga Authority, set up in 2009 to clean up the holy river and protecting its minimum ecological flow while ensuring the water quality and environmental sustenance. The immediate provocation for the act of the Waterman and his colleagues was the ongoing fast-unto-death by the swami-turned-technocrat on the banks of the Ganga at Varanasi.

Union Minister for Forests & Environment Jayanti Natarajan rang up Mr. Singh —who had retired to his Tarun Ashram, the headquarters of the Tarun Bharat Sangh in Bheekampura in Rajasthan's Alwar district for two days after he sent in the resignation — and communicated the viewpoint of the Prime Minister in this regard.

“The Prime Minister refuses to accept your resignation. He is confident that with your help we can accomplish the work of conserving the Ganga and making it pollution free,” Ms. Natarajan reportedly told Mr. Singh on the phone on Monday. The Minister's phone call was preceded by a meeting of Union Ministers, who are members of the Authority, including Pranab Mukherjee and Sriprakash Jaiswal, besides Ms. Natarajan.

“Ms. Natarajan called up to communicate the message of the Prime Minister,” said Mr. Singh talking to *The Hindu* in Jaipur. “The immediate need is to save the life of Prof. Agarwal, whose fast for the cause of the Ganga has entered the 59th day today [on Monday]. We are all worried about his failing health,” he said.

The octogenarian Professor, formerly with IIT-Kanpur and Central Pollution Control Board (now Swami Gyan Swarup Sanand), started his fast unto death at Kedar Ghat, Varanasi, demanding protection of the Ganga on January 14. Since March 8, he has been refusing to take water as well, making his condition very precarious.

“I have told Ms. Natarajan that I will go with the government emissaries to Varanasi to plead with Prof. Agarwal to end the fast. I want to save his life,” Mr. Singh said. As for the conditions for taking back the resignation, he said he

would place them before the government. Asked about the other two members who had resigned with him, Mr. Singh said he would talk to them.