



Waterman on Ganga Yatra to sensitise public

Binay Singh, TNN Oct 11, 2010, 09.42pm IST

VARANASI: To connect people to the cause of the Ganga, Waterman of India and Magsaysay awardee Rajendra Singh is nowadays on a Ganga Lok Yatra along with a small group of water conservationists.

"It is not just the responsibility of the governments (Central and state) alone, but every citizen of the country is equally responsible to protect Mother Ganga from pollution," said Singh, who stayed in Varanasi for two days in the course of his journey to Ganga Sagar. He started his journey from Delhi on October 1 and was expected to culminate it at Ganga Sagar on November 4.

During his stay, he met various sections of the society like manjhi (boatmen community), religious heads, students and teachers and motivated them to play their roles effectively in saving the Ganga, the National River of the country.

"I had urged the Central government to observe the Ganga protection week in June on the patterns of the wildlife protection week. I am happy that the government has accepted my suggestion and asked the state governments to celebrate Ganga Utsav in major towns during the Ganga Dussehra," Singh told TOI before leaving for Ghazipur on Sunday. He is also an expert member of the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA). Showing the letter of joint secretary, Union ministry of environment and forests, Rajiv Gauba, he said it had been decided that every year a Ganga Utsav might be organised for one week in major towns along the Ganga during the Ganga Dussehra. The Ganga Dussehra generally falls in the month of June.

During the Ganga Utsav, the state governments may conduct special public awareness participation campaign to sensitise the general public about the importance of a clean river and about the efforts of Central and states in its conservation. The state governments, under NGRBA, may launch special drives through state pollution control boards to check industrial pollution in rivers and conduct surprise inspections. They must also ensure that the existing sewage treatment plants (STPs) are run on their full capacity without interruptions and ensure continued electric supply and minimise untreated domestic effluents reaching the river.

In his letter dated (August 3, 2010) to all principal secretaries, department of urban development concerned NGRB states, Gauba said a number of initiatives had been taken by the Central and state governments under the NGRBA for conservation of the Ganga. Several pollution abatement projects have been approved, action has been initiated for seeking the World Bank assistance and a comprehensive Ganga River Basin Management Plan is being prepared by a consortium of seven IITs.

It is important that steps are taken at this stage to enhance public awareness and community participation in the activities of NGRBA. Regarding constitution of city-level monitoring committees for involvement of public representatives, members of public and NGOs and for involvement of youth organisations like the National Cadet Corps (NCC), National Service Scheme (NSS) and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) in river conservation, he said river conservation projects might be finalised only after public consultation. "However, detailed response from most of the states is still awaited," he added.

Gauba also pointed out in his letter that Rajendra Singh of Tarun Bharat Sangh, an expert member of NGRBA, had expressed his willingness to help mobilise the local community in major cities along the Ganga and facilitate formulation of action plans for the involvement of youth in river conservation work. Singh will visit the NGRBA states for this purpose and hold discussions with officers of state government and district authorities. "It is requested that

necessary action may be kindly taken as suggested for promoting community mobilisation and involvement of youth in conservation of river Ganga and for organising Ganga Utsav. It is also requested that necessary cooperation may kindly be extended to Rajendra Singh during his visits to the states to help community mobilisation for river conservation," reads the letter.

"Investment of crores of rupees will not clean the river, it also needs people's commitment," pointed out Singh and added the main objective of his journey was to sensitise the masses to save the Ganga, which covered 43 per cent land of the country and provided food to 47 per cent population and water to 60 per cent population.