

## Waterman plans campaign to 'liberate' the Ganga

Special Correspondent



Waterman Rajendra Singh

Magsaysay Award winner Rajendra Singh, better known as Waterman, will launch a campaign to “liberate” the Ganga, its tributaries and contributory rivers from pollution and obstruction from Wednesday. The campaign, in the form of a 10,000-km “Ganga Lok Yatra” (People's march for the Ganga) will be on for three months.

Mr. Singh, also a member of the National Ganga Basin Authority, is starting his “yatra” from the Arvari, the rivulet he could rejuvenate some 18 years back with the support of local villagers in Alwar district of Rajasthan.

“The Arvari is a telling example. That is why the ‘yatra’, which will involve the communities along both the banks of the Ganga and its associate rivers, is starting from Hamirpur village, where a small temple dedicated to the river re-born stands,” explained Mr. Singh talking to newsmen here.

Starting from the banks of the Arvari, the march will cover the Sarsa, Bhagani, Jahaswali, Ruparel, Saahibi and the Maheshwara rivers in Rajasthan to reach the Yamuna. The first phase of the “yatra” will cover the mainstream Ganga, which is of 2,400 km, in 40 days, touching the towns of Narera, Kanauj, Kanpur, Allahabad, Varanasi and Patna to reach the Ganga Sagar and the Gomukh.

Not only the Arvari example but also the concept of Arvari Sansad (Parliament), which is 15 years old now, could be replicated in the case of the Ganga and others in the system, Mr. Singh pointed out. “The Ganga has 210 rivers including the Yamuna attached to it. The Ganga river system covers 43 per cent of the land mass in the country,” said Mr. Singh, who has been on a campaign to check pollution in the upper reaches of the Ganga and fight efforts to build dams and power plants along it.

**Rights and responsibilities**

“The effort will be to spread the message on the need to liberate our rivers from pollution and obstruction. During the campaign the volunteers will interact with all the stakeholders including the farmers, fishermen and religious men. The dialogue will be on the rights as well as the responsibilities of the people of the Ganga basin which is spread over 11 States. People will be asked to come forward to demand adequate legislation to protect the Ganga and the other rivers,” Mr. Singh explained.

The democratisation of the Ganga river system is planned in a manner similar to that of the Arvari. “At the village level we will set up the Ganga panchayats while at the municipal level it will be the Ganga Palikas. There will be Ganga Parishads at the State level which will have an apex body in the form of the Ganga Sansad (Parliament),” he said.

Talking about the successful fight the “Ganga Bachao Abhiyaan” (Save the Ganga campaign) had in the recent past by stopping the construction of hydro-electric projects at Lohari Nag Pala, Pala Maneri and Bhairo Ghati, Mr. Singh said the floods in Uttarakhand during the current monsoon proved correct his predictions on the dangers of encroachments on the Ganga.