

## Only a Central Act can save the Ganga: Waterman

Special Correspondent

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Waterman Rajendra Singh has called for a Central legislation for conservation of the national river Ganga. Only a Central Act giving the river a national status and the importance due to a national symbol would help restore its ecology and ensure its purity and uninterrupted flow, said Mr. Singh, presently spearheading a campaign for protection of the river.

The Magsaysay Award winner, also a member of the National Ganga River Basin Authority (NGRBA), talking to *The Hindu* here on Saturday, said efforts to make the political authorities realise the need to stop construction of dams and power projects on the river system, stood frustrated.

"There are seven persons at present on indefinite fast and in a critical condition. Six of them are forcibly kept in a Varanasi hospital while the seventh, Swami Agornath ji, is on the bank of the Ganga at Vidya Math," Mr. Singh said.

"Since 1986 various Governments at the Centre have been speaking of ensuring the purity and the uninterrupted flow of the Ganga. However, any corresponding action has been missing. The authorities have not learnt their lessons from the failure of the Ganga Action Plan of the Rajiv Gandhi period," Mr. Singh said. The Plan failed as it was "project driven" and its implementation was dictated by the contractors, he said.

Mr. Singh said unlike in India the major rivers elsewhere had legislations enacted by their respective countries for their protection and conservation. "The Ottawa river in Canada, the Hudson river in the US, the Thames river in the UK and the Brisbane river in Australia all have legislation on them," he pointed out. "On the contrary, no Indian river has any rejuvenation act on it," Mr. Singh said.

"The NGRBA now needs an Act to protect it and implement its mandate," Mr. Singh argued. By protocol the Ganga should be accorded the highest respect and authority among the national symbols. For this kind of national respect there would have to be a Ganga Conservation Act. As such the draft of the legislation is ready from the side of the campaigners. "On February 9 we submitted the draft of the National River Ganga ji (Conservation and Management) Act, 2012, to Minister for Environment and Forests Jayanti Natarajan. The Government should have circulated it by now," Mr. Singh noted.

The draft Bill has provision for setting up a National River Ganga Authority (NRGA) with separate boards in the States — Uttrakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

The NRGA domain will include the entire length of the Alaknanda, Mandakani and the Bhagirathi from their originating glaciers up to their confluence at Rudra Prayag or Dev Prayag and also the main stream from Dev Prayag to the Ganga Sagar.

"Unfortunately the mistakes of the British period are allowed to continue. It was in 1932 that the then Commissioner of Varanasi Hawkins had ordered the draining out of the sewage water into the Ganga for the first time. Earlier the rain water and the sewage water had separate channels of exit. This mistake of the British rule should be corrected," Mr. Singh said pointing out that the Act should have provisions of river management to take care of the health of the people and economy of the region.