



## Harvest every drop!

New Delhi, June 25 (G'nY News Service): In an exclusive interview with G'nY correspondent, the Waterman of India, Rajendra Singh, talks about the urgency of ground water replenishment.

Rajendra Singh is a renowned conservationist from Rajasthan. He has won numerous awards for his pioneering work in community-based efforts in water harvesting and water management. He won the Stockholm Water Prize, an award known as 'the Nobel Prize for water', in 2015 and the Ramon Magsaysay Award for community leadership in 2001.



*Rajendra Singh is a renowned conservationist from Rajasthan*

**A new NASA report talks of ground water being most stressed in the Indus region. What are your observations?**

**Absolutely, this one of the most stressed areas of the entire Indian subcontinent. And it is alarming actually, considering that it is the most important granary region of one of the biggest agriculture based economies of the world. The fact that this area houses the biggest aquifer in Asia, the Doab aquifer, causes more apprehension.**

**With increasing agricultural, industrial and domestic demands, the pressure on groundwater is also escalating. As a result groundwater withdrawal has gone beyond limits of safety. You can see submersible pumps, bore wells and tube wells at every 100 meters, plummeting the groundwater resource to abysmal levels.**

**See, it is just like our cell phones, in order to use it you will have to recharge it. But here, we have only been discharging, which have resulted in an overdraft of the underground aquifers. How long do you think it will last?**

**A recent CGWB data talks about 58% of India's ground water being laced by toxic arsenic and fluoride, apart from industrial and agricultural pollutants. Could any of this be changed for the better?**

**What we all fail to comprehend is that, groundwater is a delicate resource; once contaminated, it is absolutely challenging to remediate. The amelioration process not only demands time but also is very costly.**

**There is an imperative need that the Government of India (GoI) comprehend the current state of our water resources and adopt mitigation programmes before it is too late. First of all, India needs to separate the rivers from the sewers to stop further contamination of our aquifers. Also, the GoI needs to implement strict directives**

to ensure that industrial wastes are not just dumped on land or discharged into water bodies, without adequate treatment.

Do you think there has been adequate waste management efforts/programmes from the GoI?

There are no dearth of programmes in India. It is not the number of programmes/schemes that count actually. What is really important is the efficaciousness of these programmes.

Talking about programmes, what do you think about the new Ganga Action Plan? Should the nation begin to hope that the new and revamped programme will make any difference?

I am very optimistic by nature. I seek to find a glimmer of hope even in every effort of the government. (laughs)

All the previous attempts with the Ganga have been highly futile and inadequate. What do you think has changed in this new plan apart from the name? Nothing, I tell you, except amendments in the profit making agendas of the contractors and the corporate sector.

It is just that the name has been changed from Ganga Action Plan to *Namami Gange*. I am sure that this action plan will also prove to be yet another bootless attempt.

What has been your observation about the state of surface water in India?

The water governance in India is a three level governance that involves the Panchayat/Municipal Corporation, the states and the union territories as well. But sadly, all these three levels have failed to understand the importance of our water resources and implement efficacious waste management exertions.

Do you know that almost 70 per cent of India's surface water resources are polluted by human waste or toxic chemicals? It's a grave concern for all of us and is also fairly responsible for the increased pressure on groundwater resource.

How do you manage to keep your spirits up despite all the despondency in the sector?

I believe I have been blessed with a profession where good people, with serious and selfless concerns about saving this plant, surround me. I think the positivity around me makes me want to carry on.

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