

'Delhi can become water rich'

WATERMAN SPEAKS Rajendra Singh says if rain water and Yamuna are used efficiently, Capital can become self-sufficient

face to face

RAJENDRA SINGH, water conservationist

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NEW DELHI: India's water man and Stockholm Water Prize 2015 winner, Rajendra Singh talks to Hindustan Times about solutions to Delhi's water woes.

What is the status of water in Delhi and how can it best use the available resources?

Delhi has three main sources of water. The Indraprastha area, which we call thus because of the highly absorbent soil of the Yamuna floodplain. This soil has 65% absorption capacity. Nowhere else in the world can you find soil with such high absorption capacity. This is the main source of water for Delhi. The second is the Aravalli-Ridge area which has a lot of fractures. If rain water is locked in the vertical fractures

of this area it will be deposited in a deep underground bank from where even the sun's rays cannot evaporate it. If we try to collect water on the surface then we run the risk of evaporation losses. We should use this region as a recharge zone because this area has a lot of natural fractures that can be used to store water. We have to catch the rain water and store in the aquifers below. The third are the traditional water bodies we have. Delhi had 380 such water bodies but all of these have been either encroached, polluted or dried up because of over extraction. These water bodies should be identified, demarcated and mapped. A dedicated budget should be allocated. Now that the government in Delhi is ready to distribute free drinking water so it should also make a system

to store rain water in Delhi's earth fractures.

How can we convert Yamuna into a river, since its current condition is like that of a drain?

The river is in a state of coma and if the patient is in such a bad condition she should be put in an ICU, general medication will not work. The money that they are spending in the name of Yamuna's treatment is going to waste because the dirty water is mixing with the river water again. The government has spent so much money on setting up STPs but not even one of these takes the dirty water and uses it in the Capital's parks, and agricultural areas. Instead of using drinking water for all these needs we should use this sewer water, removed from the river. Unless the process of river-sewer separation is adopted a complete solution will be not be available.

What is the impact of extraction of river water at the Hathnikund Barrage on the river?

According to the Hathnikund treaty written on March 12, 1994, 300 cusecs of water was to be transferred to Delhi but the Haryana government did not adhere to this treaty. The Haryana government has established a monopoly on the Yamuna. It is time that Haryana government learnt not to waste this water on their land because even the land is ruined by excess water absorption. By April, they start growing paddy which has high water requirement and high evapora-

tion. Instead of connecting their rain pattern with their crop pattern the government is connecting their crop pattern with the market pattern which is wrong.

If Delhi starts practising the same method you used for river rejuvenation in Rajasthan, what will be the difference? If Delhi government works diligently then it is possible to attain this goal in three years. If both rain water and Yamuna water sources are effectively used then within three years Delhi can become self sufficient.

A DEDICATED BUDGET SHOULD BE ALLOCATED. THE GOVERNMENT IN DELHI SHOULD ALSO FORMULATE A SYSTEM TO STORE RAIN WATER IN DELHI'S EARTH FRACTURES.

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