

VARANASI

Joint efforts needed to make Ganga free of pollution: MPs

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Varanasi: "Until the issue of pollution of the holy Ganga starts hurting the people's sentiments, the measures to keep it free from pollution will fail to yield any positive results," said Congress MP Tariq Anwar, who had been the political advisor to former prime minister late Rajiv Gandhi when he launched the first phase of Ganga Action Plan from Varanasi in '80s. He was in the city along with several other parliamentarians to attend a seminar on Ganga, jointly organised by South Asia Foundation, Sankat Mochan Foundation and SVARAJ. When the TOI contacted him following his boat ride from Varuna to Assi on Sunday morning, he seemed to be shocked at the nil positive outcomes of the GAP-I. He admitted that it was a reality that the joint efforts, needed from government as well as the people to make the Ganga free from pollution, were not made.

Had it been better to form an independent body like Haz Committee in place of GAP to look after the water management of Ganga as well as mobilising the people to maintain its holiness? Tariq replied, "Yes, measures are needed to make it an issue of people's sentiment. Ganga could not be treated like other rivers."

Prior to this conversation, Tariq along with other MPs including Mohan Singh, Chandan Mitra, Balbir Punj and Dr Thochoh Meinya shared their experience of taking part in a seminar on Ganga and viewed its worsening condition from very close. While it was an eye opener for Mohan Singh, Chandan Mitra said that making the concerned ministries and Parliament's standing committee on environment aware about this condition of Ganga was an urgent need.

Punj and Meinya said that a national project should be launched immediately for making Ganga



The parliamentarians at the seminar on Ganga.

free from pollution and not only the government but the people would also have to show their commitment in this regard.

The parliamentarians assured that they would raise the issue of Ganga in the house very soon and also meet the prime minister. Besides, they also assured that they would make efforts to draw the attention of union and state governments to improve their coordination for keeping the river clean.

Mohan Singh said that he would also assure that the Jal Nigam was not diverting the fund of GAP for improving the condition of other rivers like Gomati. The MPs said that the JN had expertise but due to functioning under a political system it was compelled to divert the funds.

The MPs were of the opinion that apart from these efforts, a people's movement was also needed in this regard and seminars and demonstrations should also be held at places like Delhi on the issue.

Earlier, Prof Veerbhadra Mishra of SMF highlighted the outcomes of the seminar and said that it was the first occasion when such a large number of MPs from almost all the political parties assembled here to discuss the issue of Ganga. He said that if proper attention was not paid immediately, the situation would become more alarming.