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## **Suspension of Work on Ganga Projects Step in right direction, says Magsaysay awardee Mehta**

**Sandeep Rawat**  
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Mahesh Chander Mehta, noted environmentalist and Ramon Magsaysay Award winner, has termed the Central government's decision of stopping the Pala Maneri and Bhaironghati hydel projects on the Bhagirathi river as steps in the right direction and has strongly advocated for the cancellation of all projects on the Ganga.

Terming the Ganga as a river of faith for crores of Hindus, Mehta said that several religious festivals and fairs which include many holy baths like the Kumbh depend heavily on the healthy flow of the Ganga and if there would be no water left in the national river, then how would Indian culture survive?

Mehta, who is a lawyer by profession and has championed legal activism for environment conservation, emphasised on the need for saving the Ganga from the ill effects of hydel projects as well as the pollution and garbage that is getting accumulated in the holy river. Mahesh Chander Mehta was speaking at a workshop organised by his environmental foundation on Ganga Conservation in Haridwar today.

Also present were noted environmentalists, scientists, religious gurus, legal eagles, social activists, NGOs and eminent personalities from various sections of society. Dwelling further on the issue, environmental scientist Dr Gurudas Aggarwal said that the need of the hour was to not link the Ganga with economics, but evaluate its religious-sentimental aspect, only then can vital steps regarding the Ganga be taken. Shedding light on the Ganga being accorded national river status, Dr Gurudas said that a panel of nine specialists has been formed under the National Ganga River Basin Authority. These specialists should devise a master plan so that the Ganga becomes pollution free and the full and natural flow of the river is ensured, he said.

Notably, Dr Agarwal, a former Dean of the Environmental Department, IIT Delhi, was on an indefinite fast in Uttarkashi last year to stop work at the 600 MW Lohari Nag Pala hydel project on the Bhagirathi.

Lamenting upon the apathy for social values, Matrasadan founder Swami Shivanand said that it was a matter of concern that we had to move court to save the Ganga. He said that we must first ourselves ensure that the river does not get polluted. Shivanand suggested that sewage treatment must be ensured at all ashrams, hotels, lodges and other commercial ventures on the Ganga ghats.

Apart from the common man, onus was put on the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) personnel too as CPCB's former president Paritosh Tyagi remarked that a major chunk of pollution control efforts can be achieved if the CPCB employees do their respective work with sincerity and honesty.

Pointing out that the government allots massive funds for the Ganga cleaning project yet the usage and implementation of these funds are not effectively monitored and utilised. Scientific experts who put forward their views on Ganga conservation included NBR Lucknow scientist UN Rai; Gurukul Kangri University's Dr Gagan Matta; NEERI's JK Wasin; Public Science Institute's Dr Anil Gautam and Dr Rakesh Bhutyani.

Former Jammu legislator Ashok Sharma, Mahish Gehlot, Shambhu Nautiyal, locals and students were also present at the convention.