

an>

Title: Need to declare river cleaning projects as National Projects.

DR. SHRIKANT EKNATH SHINDE (KALYAN): First of all, I congratulate Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji and Minister of Water Resources Uma Bharti ji for undertaking a herculean task of cleaning river Ganga. There have been many attempts in the past to clean the holy river, however the sheer scale of this challenge is so mammoth that in spite of our best efforts and even after spending thousands of crores of rupees, we are faced with new challenges every time. However, the commitment and intent with which the present government has undertaken this task gives confidence to crores of Indians who worship river Ganga.

Like Ganga, many rivers in India are in urgent need of cleaning and rejuvenation. Sadly we have criminally neglected our rivers and have turned many rivers in Nallahs and gutters by discharging untreated sewage into them.

Today, we are thinking of linking rivers to overcome the scarcity and flood issues. However, we need to urgently undertake the river cleaning projects across all states.

In my Kalyan constituency, Waldhuni and Ulhas are two main rivers. Entire Thane district draws water from Ulhas river though it is highly polluted. Waldhuni river has already been turned into Nallah. The state government had formed 'Waldhuni River Authority' on the lines of 'Mithi River Authority' in Mumbai. The said authority has prepared a detailed plan for cleaning Waldhuni. However, it requires a budget of Rs.650 crores, which neither the state government nor local bodies are in a position to spend.

National Green Tribunal, in July 2015, had imposed the collective fine of Rs. 100 crore on the local bodies which was to be used for the cleaning of Waldhuni and Ulhas. These bodies are unable to pay this fine and they approached the high court and got the stay.

However, this has not solved the problem. The financial position of these local bodies is precarious and they cannot undertake large projects without the help of either the state or the central government.

I am sure there would be many such rivers across the nation requiring thousands of crores of rupees and the financial position of all the local bodies across the nation is more or less the same. Therefore, I sincerely urge the honorable Prime Minister to take a policy decision to declare river cleaning projects as National Projects and set up a separate fund for it so that these projects can be taken up in time bound manner.