



River Research  
centre



**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **National Workshop FOR freshwater flow in Rivers**

### **Why do our governments have NO VALUE FOR RIVERS?**

A two day National Workshop on need for policy and legal norms for allowing freshwater flows in Rivers in India on January 3-4, 2009 at Bangalore ended with a unanimous demand that governments must allow continuous, sustained freshwater flows in all perennial rivers of India, whenever, a dam, diversion or hydropower project is planned, constructed or operated.

Inaugurating the workshop on the morning of January 3, 2009, Shri L C Jain, former member, planning commission of India (and many other important posts), expressed his pain and anguish on the state of India's Rivers, "It is very disturbing that the acts of commissions and omissions of the authorities have ruthlessly, blindly, heartlessly lead to destruction of almost every major rivers of India. The hearts of the officials and ministers should throb for the millions depending for their needs and livelihoods on the rivers, but it seems that the stones of the South and North block buildings have entered their hearts." Quoting Gandhiji's agenda for the economic independence of India from what he wrote in the *Young India* on November 29, 1929, Jain said, Land, Water and Air cannot be subject of commerce, but the planners lock up the pain, hunger, malnutrition in the paragraphs of their five year plan documents and do not ensure their inclusion in their actual plans and programmes. He expressed his deep anguish that even the recommendations of the official policies and committees on ensuring freshwater flows in the rivers remain unimplemented.

In his key note address, well known expert on environment flows and member of a number of official committees of the government of India, Prof Brij Gopal from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, said, the flowing rivers also provide a lot of benefits to the society, but there has been no assessment of the in-stream benefits of the rivers when taking decisions about off stream diversions. Well known as waterman of India for the remarkable work of rejuvenating dead rivers in arid Rajasthan through community efforts, Rajendra Singh said in his key note address on January 4, 2009 that Arvari River Parliament is a democratic system of governing a river basin, that has 160 members from 72 villages and should be the model for river basin governance in India. Ravindranath from River Basin Friends, Assam, said that the free flowing rivers of North East India are managed by the communities and they should be allowed to remain in their natural state in the interest and as per the wishes of the people of the region.

Over 35 people from organizations all over India, including from the Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, and Rajasthan participated in the meeting called by River Research Centre (Thrisoor, Kerala), SVARAJ (Bangalore) and South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People (Delhi).

While such a need flows indirectly from a number of policy and legal instruments, including the National Water Policy of 2002 and the mandate of the Water Quality Assessment Authority set up under the Environment Protection Act of 1986, there are no explicit provisions to this effect. The workshop, hence demanded that such norms are urgently needed. In addition, a number of undimmed rivers, need to be allowed to continue to flow unfettered in the interest of social, cultural, environmental and even economic interest of the people and the nation. In the river basins that have large dams under construction or operation, the operation of such dams need to be changed so that they also allow constant flow for the stretches downstream from the rivers. In some cases, where the dams have already been proved to be having greater costs than benefits, it should also be assessed if it won't be better for the society to decommission such dams. All such decisions of releases, redesigning of the operations or decommissioning should be taken, in full consultation with the communities in the areas downstream from such projects, and considering livelihood, social and cultural needs, the groundwater recharge, biodiversity including fisheries, salinity ingress, and so on.

The workshop ended with an action plan that contains a number of short and medium term activities to achieve the objective to ensuring that perennial rivers of India continue to flow with freshwater at all times.

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