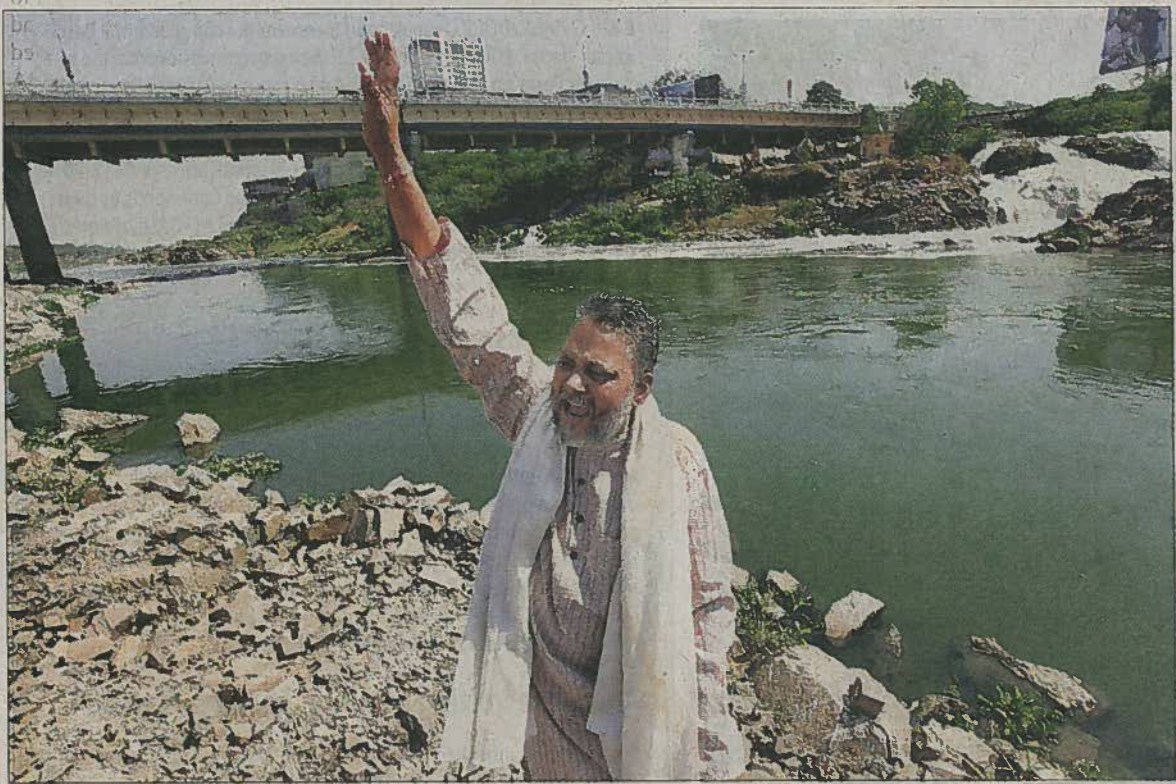


Publication      Date      Page No.      Editions      Position      Language

Indian Express-PNL	22 <sup>nd</sup> February 2011	01	Pune	Center Left	English
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**A LESSON FROM RAJASTHAN:** Rajendra Singh at the Mutha river after he led a group of activists to the site on Monday on being told about the river facing danger from a civic project

SANDEEP DAUNDKAR

# Spur-of-the-moment stir against PMC river plan

Waterman Rajendra Singh gets up from seminar, leads people to the Mutha

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

FEBRUARY 21

HE is known in Rajasthan as Johadwale baba — the water man — and he proved in Pune on Monday that he has not earned that tag for nothing. In the city to receive the Vasundhara Award on Monday, Magsaysay winner Rajendra Singh put to telling effect his call for action rather than discussions and seminars for solutions to problems.

Even as he called for “immediate steps” to stop deterioration of the Mutha river bisecting the city, Singh suddenly stopped his speech and requested those present to follow him to the river bank near Kalyaninagar bridge.

“The city is blessed with five rivers, which are being turned into drains. In a city such as Pune, which is known for education, even if 10 people in this gathering feel that what is being done to their rivers is wrong, we should immediately go and stop the excavation work in riverbed,” Singh appealed to those present and walked out of Patrakar Sangh, the venue where he was addressing a discussion on JNNURM projects on Pune rivers.

The audience walked out with him

and the group reassembled under Kalyaninagar bridge, where, the excavation work otherwise on was already halted for some reason. “If the work was on, I would have sat in front of the JCB machine,” he said, then, going on to conduct a signature movement to halt the work.

**“ Maintenance of rivers is important for democracy. A society where authorities work and citizens are negligent cannot carry on with a democratic set-up for long.**

**RAJENDRA SINGH**  
Magsaysay Award winner

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Earlier, at the discussion session at Patrakar Sangh, a team led by activist Sarang Yadwadkar had alleged that using funds allotted for river restoration, PMC has been pushing forth the river transport project. “A proposal for a river navigation project was sent by the PMC to Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Irrigation Department and Central Design Office, Nashik for approval. In spite of adverse

remarks about the feasibility and environmental impact of the project from these agencies, PMC is pushing the project ahead and the work is already in progress. Documents obtained through RTI show JNNURM funds allotted for river restoration are partly being used for the project,” said Yadwadkar.

Singh, whose action to lead them to the river was based on these allegations, said, “Maintenance of rivers is important for democracy. A society where authorities are working and citizens are negligent cannot carry on with a democratic set-up for long. Despite being the hub for education, if people here cannot react to what is being done to their rivers, I would call it a dead city.”

He added, “Twentyseven years ago, when we started a social cause, we were five. Over the next two months, the rest dropped out and only I carried it forward. Today, along with local residents, I have saved and revived seven rivers, a task wise citizens of this city can do easily,” said Singh, who had received the Magsaysay for his work in the field of water management in the community leadership category. He received the Vasundhara Award from industrialist Atul Kirloskar at Yeshwantrao Chavan auditorium in Kothrud on Monday.