

Union Jal Shakti Minister Shri C. R. Paatil Hosts Water Warriors from Across India at His Residence

Grassroots champions share inspiring stories of river rejuvenation, water conservation and community mobilization

Shri Paatil calls for focused action, measurable outcomes and wider Jan Bhagidari

Secretary, DoWR, RD & GR Smt. Archana Varma lauds their role in mobilising communities for collective action on water

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Union Minister of Jal Shakti Shri C. R. Paatil today interacted with Water Conservation Warriors and River Rejuvenation Warriors from different parts of the country who have been leading grassroots initiatives in water conservation, river and water-body rejuvenation and environmental protection. The interaction, organised by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) under Namami Gange, provided a platform for these grassroots champions to share their journeys, learn from one another and discuss how successful community-led models can be strengthened and replicated across the country.



The participants shared first-hand experiences of restoring rivers and ponds, undertaking Shramdaan, promoting rainwater harvesting, removing plastic and other waste near water bodies, carrying out plantation drives and mobilising women, youth, volunteers and local communities. Their stories

highlighted how individual initiative, when combined with collective action and community ownership, can translate into visible and sustained improvements on the ground.

Among those who shared their work was **Ramveer Tanwar**, popularly known as the 'Pondman of India', who spoke about rejuvenating more than 100 ponds and establishing 10 mini urban forests. **Kamini Kumari** from Bihar highlighted her initiative in mobilising 500 women to construct 500 groundwater recharge pits along the Baya River in a single day, linking water conservation with groundwater recharge, sustainable agriculture and livelihood opportunities for women.

Surendra Singh Chaudhary, popularly known as 'Bittu Tabahi', shared his journey of taking up the clean-up of the polluted Ajnar River at Biaora in Rajgarh district of Madhya Pradesh. A young B.Sc. student, he began the effort on 26 January 2026 and undertook hands-on removal of plastic, weeds, sludge and other waste from the river, largely through his own initiative. His work, which began as a local effort, drew wider public attention and has inspired greater participation in the cleaning and restoration of local water bodies.

Anand Malligavad from Bengaluru spoke about his work in restoring 33 lakes and planting more than one lakh native trees. Jagdish Singh Negi from Uttarakhand shared his work in water conservation, forest restoration and converting plastic waste into eco-bricks. **Subham Kumar** highlighted the role of youth and volunteers in river cleanliness and his efforts to mobilise communities to remove more than 2.47 lakh kilograms of waste from the banks of the Ganga and its tributaries.

The interaction also highlighted the role of water volunteers and community groups in sustaining clean rivers and ghats. **Akash Yadav** from Uttar Pradesh shared how his 15-member volunteer group has contributed to the rejuvenation of four Ganga ghats and the removal of more than one tonne of plastic waste. **Dr. Sanjivini Sharma** from Kanpur spoke about mobilising more than 900 volunteers for Ganga conservation campaigns and removing over 120 metric tonnes of waste, besides promoting plastic recycling, reuse of discarded materials and livelihood opportunities for women through community-led waste management.

The other water warriors included Ms. Kusum Gildiyal, Sh. Jagdish Negi, Ms. Rama Tiwari, Dr. Suman Pandey, Ms. Kumari Sunita Singh, Sh. Sanjay Kumar Singh, Sh. Ajay Kumar Tivare, Sh. Nitish Kumar Singh, Sh. Kamlesh Bhai Shastri, Sh. Sandeep Chaudhary, Ms. Sirkunwar, Ms. Phoolbati and Sh. Vivek Bhat. The work of these warriors were highly appreciated by Hon'ble Minister Jal Shakti.

Addressing the gathering, Smt. Archana Varma, Secretary, Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, appreciated the role played by the Water Warriors in taking the message of water conservation and cleanliness beyond government programmes and into communities. She praised their ability to bring people together and mobilise collective action around rivers, ponds and other water bodies, and emphasised that such citizen-led participation is essential for sustaining water conservation and river rejuvenation efforts over the long term.

Addressing the participants, Shri C. R. Paatil congratulated them for their commitment and said that listening directly to their experiences was an opportunity to understand the scale, diversity and impact of grassroots action taking place across the country. He acknowledged that many of them had worked through difficult local circumstances and had nevertheless succeeded in bringing people together for the protection of water and the environment. Referring to the larger national movement, Shri Paatil said that under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, water conservation has evolved into a nationwide Jan Andolan anchored in Jan Bhagidari. He said that the Prime Minister's consistent emphasis on conserving every drop of water has inspired citizens and communities across the country to take ownership of water conservation, and that the work of the Water Warriors and reflects this spirit of collective action.

The Minister emphasized that the next step should be to translate this energy into focused, measurable and sustained outcomes. He encouraged the participants to identify specific rivers, ponds, ghats and other water bodies, set clear targets and demonstrate visible improvement on the ground. He also stressed the importance of involving women, youth, schoolchildren, senior citizens and other sections of society so that water conservation and cleanliness become enduring people's movements rather than one-time activities.

Shri Paatil encouraged the Water Warriors to remain connected with one another, regularly share their work and learn from successful models being implemented in different parts of the country. He said that good local initiatives should not remain confined to one place, but should be adapted and expanded wherever they can help communities address similar challenges.

The Water Warriors expressed happiness at being invited by the Minister to his residence and at the opportunity to share their stories directly with him. They also valued the chance to interact with fellow grassroots champions from different parts of India, exchange experiences, understand different approaches to community mobilisation and explore ways to remain connected and collaborate in future.

The interaction reaffirmed that protecting rivers and conserving water cannot be achieved through infrastructure and government programmes alone. Sustained Jan Bhagidari, Shramdaan, responsible community behaviour and committed grassroots leadership are equally important. The experiences shared during the meeting demonstrated how citizens, volunteers and local communities can become powerful partners in the national effort for clean rivers, conserved water resources and a cleaner, more sustainable environment.

ND/HM

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