Telangana Today 07-May-2021

Treat Fair

We must get our share of water

Telangana has suffered enough as a region and now, as a State, it deserves its rightful equitable allocation of river waters

SRIDHAR RAO DESHPANDE

SALLA VIJAYA KUMAR

AN AD HOC WATER-SHARING ARRANGEMENT FOR A YEAR CANNOT BE THE BASIS TO NOTIFY JURISDICTION OF KRISHNA RIVER MANAGEMENT BOARD PROJECTS

Seven years ago, the Telangana government filed a complaint with the Union government under Section 3 of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, for referring its grievances to a water disputes tribunal.

The State kept pursuing the matter with the Union government in all possible ways. Finally, in October, 2020, in the 2nd Apex Council Meeting, the Minister for Jal Shakthi accepted the request of the Telangana Chief Minister to refer its complaint to a Tribunal. But so far, no action has been initiated.

Favouring Andhra

Since 1956 when the Telangana region was merged with the Andhra State against the wishes of its people and recommendations of the State Reorganisation Commission, the apathy of the Union government was clearly visible. For instance, in the early years of the merger, the Union government, which was supposed to take the initiative to continue the irrigation facilities for the Telangana region as planned by erstwhile Hyderabad State, did not act.

The Andhra Pradesh government accorded priority to the Andhra region at the cost of the Telangana region. At the time of the merger, the population of the Telangana region was 33% of the combined AP and Andhra region was 67%. Obviously, in a democracy, majority's will prevails.

Further, as the law of the land provides for only the State governments to represent their States before the water dispute tribunals, the AP government represented the State before the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunals. It has blatantly given the least priority to water requirements of the Telangana region inside the Krishna basin. Instead, it focused on the Andhra region's requirements outside the basin. Also, it has manifestly undermined the agreements signed by the erstwhile Hyderabad government, which favoured the Telangana region. KWDT-I had to allocate water based on such averments of AP and consensus among the then three-party States.

Even the KWDT-I award was cleverly violated by AP. For instance, while the inter-State Agreement signed by the riparian States contributing equally for a noble cause of providing 15 TMC per annum drinking water to Chennai, Andhra Pradesh enhanced the capacity of the head regulator and canals to 11,150 cusecs instead of the agreed 1,500 cusecs capacity canal (gradually it increased to 44,000 and is now going for more than 80,000 cusecs) and later named it as the Telugu Ganga Project.

Unfortunately, the Union government cleared the head regulator and canals in 1981 by unreasonably allocating return flows generated in Telangana to the Andhra region outside the basin. It acted simply on the submissions by the then AP government.

Tribunal for Telangana

Apart from many such earlier incidences of neglect by the Union government, while enacting the AP Reorganisation Act, 2014, the water issues of the Telangana region were not addressed. The existing Tribunal KWDT-II was extended through section-89 of the APRA Act, 2014, to adjudicate the sharing between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, but the issues referred got very limited scope and do not have the ambit to address the long pending grievances of Telangana. Hence, immediately after the formation of the State, the Telangana government filed a complaint with the Union government to refer its grievances to a Tribunal.

Since the Union government did not act within the stipulated one year, Telangana filed a writ petition before the Supreme Court in 2015. Here it is pertinent to mention that in 2014, the Ministry of Law and Justice opined in favour of referring the complaint of Telangana to a Tribunal which has not happened till date.

Meanwhile, during the hearing of Telangana's writ petition, the Union government submitted an affidavit that the allocation already made by the Tribunals to the States of Maharashtra and Karnataka shall not be disturbed. But, it is clear from the affidavit that the Union government did not say anything against referring Telangana's section 3 complaint to a Tribunal.

Limited Scope

From the Union government's correspondence with various stakeholders and its affidavit before the Supreme Court and the orders of KWDT-II pronounced in October 2016, it is clear that the KWDT-II is not going to review the allocations already made to Maharashtra and Karnataka. Hence, it becomes obvious that the extended Tribunal would be (or if a new Tribunal is constituted also) dealing with the adjudication between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh only, out of the allocations made by KWDT-I & II to erstwhile Andhra Pradesh.

It is pertinent to know that the Tribunal extended under Section 89 of APRA, 2014, has limited scope of adjudication of water allocation and it is not a review Tribunal. Hence, the Telangana government chose to file the said complaint.

KRMB Project Jurisdiction

Keeping all these in view, in 2018, the Telangana government wrote to the Union government to limit the scope of its complaint under Section 3 of ISRWD Act, 1956, between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh only and refer it to the existing Tribunal or a new Tribunal.

Ironically, while keeping the Section 3 complaint pending, the Union government eagerly wants to notify the jurisdiction of the projects under Krishna River Management Board based on the June 2015 agreement between AP and Telangana, which was only an ad hoc water-sharing arrangement for one year. In fact, without finalisation of adjudication of shares between AP and TS by the present KWDT-II or a new Tribunal to be constituted, how can KRMB monitor the regulation?

Telangana has suffered enough as a region and now, as a State, it deserves its rightful equitable allocation of river waters. The Union government must heed the grievances of its constituent federal units.

(The authors are representatives of Telangana Engineers JAC)

Millennium Post 07-May-2021

'Monsoon onset over Kerala likely on June 1'

MPOST BUREAU

NEW DELHI: Extended forecast suggests that monsoon will arrive in Kerala around June 1, its normal onset date, said M Rajeevan, the secretary in the Ministry of Earth Sciences, on Thursday.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) will issue an official monsoon forecast on May 15, he said.

"Monsoon 2021 update: India MET department extended range forecast suggests monsoon will arrive over Kerala on time, around 1 June. This is an early indication. India MET department official monsoon forecast on 15 May and rainfall forecast update around May 31," he tweeted.

Vehicles ply during light rainfall in New Delhi, on Thursday PTI

The southwest monsoon, which brings nearly 75 per cent of the country's rainfall, is expected to be normal this year, the IMD said.

The Long Period Average will be 98 per cent with an error margin of plus and minus 5 per cent, it said.

The Tribune 07-May-2021

Monsoon likely to hit Kerala on June 1

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MAY 6

The southwest monsoon will arrive in Kerala around June 1, its normal onset date, the government said today. M Rajeevan, Secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, said in a tweet that the India Meteorological Department's extended range forecast suggested seasonal rains would arrive over the Indian mainland on time.

This is an early indication, he said, adding the department would issue an official monsoon forecast on May 15 and rainfall forecast update around May 31.

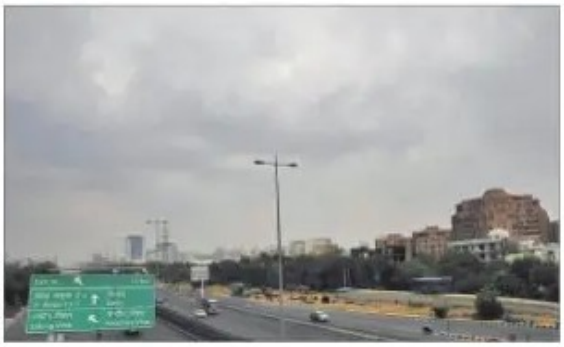
The monsoon, which irrigates nearly two-thirds of India's agricultural tracts, is expected to be normal this year. According to the IMD, the Long Period Average is expected to be 98 per cent with an error margin of 5 per cent.

The Tribune 07-May-2021

MET PREDICTS THUNDERSTORM TODAY

- A dust storm accompanied by a spell of rain swept parts of the state on Thursday evening, disrupting power supply and uprooting of trees
- As per the MeT forecast, isolated parts of the state are expected to witness thunderstorm and lightning along with hail and winds of up to 30-40 kmph on Friday
- An official in the Meteorological Department said rainfall lashed many places across the state. PTI

Clouds overcast the sky in Gurugram on Thursday evening. >>



S. CHANDAN

Times Nation 07-May-2021

Will The Proposed Ken-Betwa Project Solve The Region's Water Woes Or Destroy Livelihoods And Ecosystems? Experts Are Sharply Divided

With uneven rain, river linking only way to ensure equitable distribution of water

AB Pandya
FOR

Interlinking of rivers will help the country fulfill its dream of ensuring equitable distribution of water and, thereby, prosperity for all. There have been several such steps in this direction, and in 1980 a National Perspective Plan was formalised. This involved transfer of water from water-surplus basins to water-deficit basins/regions in which 30 links were identified. Somehow, the term 'river interlinking' stuck in the public imagination though its real name could have been the National Inter-Basin Water Transfer Project.

So why do we need to link rivers? Though India receives about 4,000 BCM (billion cubic meters) of precipitation annually, utilisable resources are only 1,123 BCM. Even these are not distributed evenly in space or time. Most of the precipitation occurs in about 90 days in a year and the distribution of annual average availability ranges from 510 BCM for Ganga, 527 BCM from Brahmaputra and 11.02 BCM for Pennar and 12.06 BCM for Sabarmati. This shows the skew

Like any other infrastructure project, Ken-Betwa interlinking will have some environmental and resettlement issues. But, with a comprehensive environment management plan, compensatory afforestation and a liberal R&R policy, these impacts will be taken care of

between potential demands and availability. It has, therefore, been recognised that the inter-basin transfer of water is the only recourse for making an equitable distribution of water across the country and thereby ensuring equal opportunities of development.

Inter-basin water transfer is not a new concept and there have been many such successful examples in the country. It has been practised in our country since 1887 when the Mulla Periyar dam was built and waters of the west-flowing river basin were transferred to east flowing Vaigai basin transforming agricultural development in and around Madurai for about 68,000 hectares. Just ask any one in Madurai about the role this water plays in their lives. Similarly, we have already made trans- basin transfers in case of the Beas Satluj link, Sardar Sahayak pariyojana, Sardar Sarovar project, Kurnool Cuddapah canal etc which are functioning well. In the US, the Colorado-Big Thompson project has been functioning since the 1930s and has contributed greatly to the economy of Colorado state.

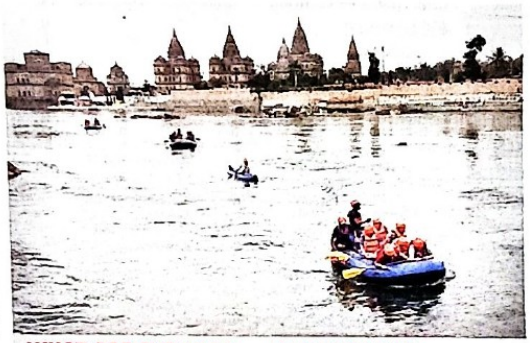
Critics of this concept propound myths like massive rehabilitation requirements, environmental damage etc but these are all based on conjecture rather than reality. One of the crucial features of the project is location of reservoirs in areas with very low population density with only the canals running in agricultural areas.

More than connecting multiple rivers like an electricity grid, the project aims at serving irrigation to the lower commands and transferring the corresponding surplus waters from upper commands to the neighbouring basin. We do not have an extreme disparity in terms of flora and fauna between neighbouring basins in peninsular India. Hence, this talk of mixing of waters and invasion of foreign species etc are not founded in any reality. Existing water transfers have also not indicated any such effects. There is a clamour about the disruption of climate due to such transfers. Once again, the same is purely conjectural as the impacts required to be created for such a climate change versus the actual transfers envisaged are tiny. As an example, the total yield of Ganga and Brahmaputra combined in Bay of Bengal is more than 1,000 BCM whereas the diversion is likely to be no more than 40 BCM annually and that too will ultimately result in reaching Bay of Bengal due to land topography. In any case, the linkage between any of the basins and their outlets into the seas are not being modified. On the other hand, the proposals can provide 172 lakh hectares of annual irrigation which, considering an average farm size of one hectare, can benefit 17.2 million farmer families and possibly 86 million people. In addition, 780 million can get assured drinking water supply. Surface water in water scarce areas will stop unsustainable groundwater utilisation as well. Thus, the benefits far outweigh costs. The question as to why such beneficial schemes are not yet getting implemented is due to our internal wrangling.

Ken Betwa happens to be the first link which was identified for implementation. It will benefit the perennially water-short Bundelkhand region and other associated regions of Bina and upper Betwa basins. Besides irrigation and drinking water, it will generate 103 MW of hydropower and 27 MW solar power. Like any other infrastructure project, KBLP will also have some environmental and resettlement and rehabilitation (R&R) issues. Daudhan reservoir will cause submergence of about 9,000 ha land of which 5,800 ha is forest land. However, with a comprehensive environment management plan (EMP), compensatory afforestation and liberal R&R policy, these impacts will be taken care of. A comprehensive landscape management plan is also being prepared for the conservation of Panna Tiger Reserve. Even wildlife will get sustenance in hot summers with assured water supply from the reservoir. The reservoir remaining at relatively low level will expose large tracts of land allowing fodder to be grown, benefitting the lower rung of wildlife which, in turn, can support the whole pyramid.

The project will provide year-round employment in Bundelkhand region, controlling forced migration to far flung areas for livelihood. The assured drinking water supply will also uplift health standards of the local populace.

Pandya is Secretary General, International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage



WHAT ARE THE PROS...

- Irrigation water to help farmers in water-scarce areas
- Drinking water supply will reduce pressure on ground water sources
- Hydro and solar power to be generated

AND THE CONS

- Will submerge large parts of Panna reserve and impact Ken ghariyal sanctuary
- Large-scale chopping of trees will only increase water scarcity
- Hydropower is expensive and usually unviable

TIMES FACE-OFF

Participate in the reader poll and give comments on this debate by visiting http://bit.ly/timesfaceoff or scanning QR code. Poll results and top comments will be featured in the paper

Our quest to control rivers doesn't account for the stiff ecological cost

Rohan D'Souza
AGAINST

At first glance, the Interlinking Rivers Programme (ILRP) offers great appeal. India is generously endowed with a sprawling river system but though bounteous and generous, these rivers are whimsical: prone to recurring floods, bone-dry droughts and with vast volumes winding circuitously before wastefully emptying into the sea.

Enter the engineer with a grand vision. Why not link India's river network through dams, diversions and barrages, while impounding much of their flows within giant reservoirs that are connected? Then wire this mix of concrete and steel infrastructure with software involving a couple of equations, data sets, sensors and the ingenuity of some hard hat engineers and, soon enough, all the rivers can be put on tap. That is, capture the surplus flows of a river and transfer it to a water deficit or stressed region. This, in fact, is the best argument put forward for the Ken-Betwa link.

On closer scrutiny, however, this fantastical and elegant ILRP notion falls flat. The disconnect between idea and reality, in fact, plays out at three levels.

First, the entire project rests on a wrong assumption. There is no such thing as a river with a 'surplus flow'. Since the 1980s, studies under the broad field of 'river ecology' have convincingly established that a river cannot be defined as 'lots of water' in a channel. Rather, every river is a fluvial highway that connects flora and fauna across and between floodplains, wetlands, deltas and estuaries. In sum, it delivers innumerable environmental services such as creating fish habitats, replenishing soil, sustaining biodiversity and sculpting land through erosion and deposition.

Seasonal variability floods or low flows are vital to enabling the river to constantly evolve its rich diversity of ecological relations. The Brahmaputra or the Ganga, for example, should therefore be understood not as massive flows but as a collection of ecological relations and environmental services. If a river is thus a biological regime, then it cannot have a surplus flow.

If the principal assumption is clearly wrong, it should also come as no surprise when a second order of complications follows from the first. Notably, the flawed reasoning that often goes with making economic calculations for the project. It is now fairly well known that many if not every big dam or large-scale irrigation project in India has a tendency to get their cost and benefit ratios mostly muddled. To a great extent, this is because economics as a discipline continues to have a hard time developing methodologies that can meaningfully capture ecological costs. This gets even messier when grappling with plotting future scenarios.

Consequently, for all the assumed benefits of irrigation and electricity from large dams, the long-term impacts from water logging, salinity or the loss of fisheries have yet to be meaningfully added up. That is, no reliable assessment has thus far been carried out that can meaningfully tell us whether over 70 years of large-scale water infrastructure development were worth the ecological costs.

But the wrong assumption and flawed reasoning that haunts the ILRP is actually indicative of a far more profound and fatal limitation. Recent scholarship, mostly by historians, has ably described how water infrastructure and management in post Independent India has tended to retain a strong colonial engineering mindset. The earliest version of the ILRP was, in fact, first championed in the 1850s by the famed colonial engineer and irrigator General Sir Arthur Cotton. Titled the Peninsular Scheme, Cotton's plan was to build navigation canals that would link Karachi (now in Pakistan) to Madras (Chennai) via Kanpur, Kolkata and Cuttack with additional lines crawling upwards to Pune. In terms of rivers, this meant connecting the Indus to the Ganga with canals before dropping the latter steeply to the South to link up with the Mahanadi, Krishna, Godavari and finally the Cauvery. And if such a vast navigation network could be built, the General then confidently concluded, there would be no need for the railways in British India.

Though Cotton's Peninsular Scheme came to grief, the colonial quest for river control remains. Notably in the poorly understood claim that rivers are mere flows that need to be regulated and can be put to work by dams, barrages, weirs, embankments and canal systems. Starkly missing in the picture is how we

The entire project rests on a wrong assumption. There is no such thing as a river with a 'surplus flow'. And if the principal assumption is clearly wrong, it should come as no surprise that the other calculations are based on flawed reasoning

make sense of the river as a complex biological pulse.

Does this mean that rivers should never be engineered? No.

The argument is for 'smart engineering', which is a rapidly evolving approach in Europe. Smart engineers build projects that are in active dialogue with social scientists, ecologists and specially those who specialise in design. Cement and contractor engineering can no longer address ecological complexity and the ILRP is the last surviving dinosaur in that tradition. If the coming challenges of water shortages and extreme flood events are to be meaningfully dealt with, then Indian engineering has to embrace new knowledge and be inventive enough to enable a productive conversation between science, ecology, history, sociology and art. A river, after all, is more than just water.

D'Souza is Professor, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University