Telangana Today –9 May -2024

TS to get 2.25 tmc from Narayanpur

Karnataka responds positively to Telangana request

STATE BUREAU
Hyderabad

The State government has secured 2.25 tmc of water as an emergency release from Karnataka ahead of the parliamentary polls. In anticipation of an impending water crisis, Irrigation authorities had made a request in March to the Karnataka government for release of water from the upper Krishna projects in the event of acute scarcity conditions.

Their Karnataka counterparts have responded positively to the request and started releasing water from the Narayanpur dam on Wednesday. It would take two and a half days for the water released in Karnataka to reach the Jurala project, flowing down a distance of 167 kilometres.

A major worry in taking water from Karnataka project was the transmission loss during the peak summer.

Minimal trasmission loss

However, the loss is expected to be minimal this time, as Karnataka has already been supporting thermal operations at the Raichur power station with regular water supplies to Guljapur project (112 km away from Narayanpur). The Jurala project, which is to receive water from Narayanpur dam, is 55 km away.

Request made for 10 TMC

The State had sought 10 TMC of water from Karnataka, which however did not respond immediately in view of the water crisis being faced under the Almatti and Narayanpur dams. Irrigation Secretary Rahuk Bojja then wrote to his Karnataka counterpart once again recently requesting at least 5 TMC. The situation in Karnataka districts and cities under the Krishna basin projects was said to be relatively better compared to Bengaluru city, which falls under the Cauvery basin.

The Karnataka government responded positively to the request made by the State after assessing it own water requirement for the next three months.

Chief Engineer Vijay Bhaskar Reddy and his team of officials met Irrigation officials of Karnataka in Bengaluru recently as part of the mission.

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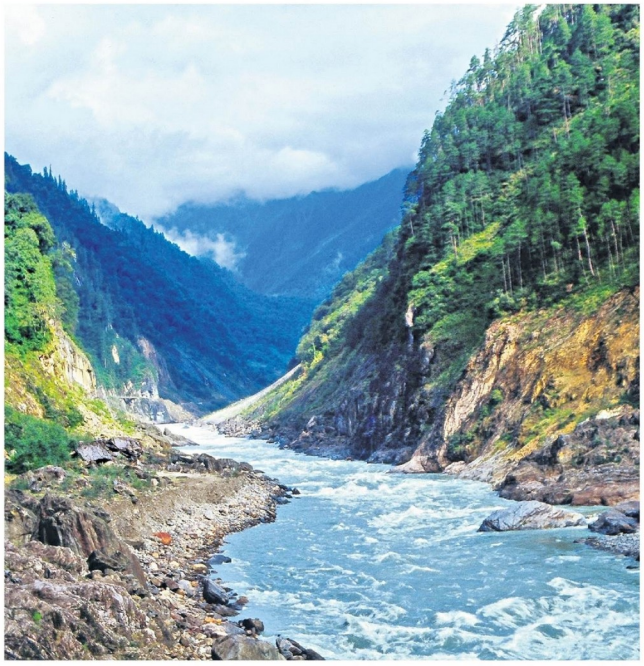
Borders and water tensions

The growing supply-demand gap in water availability can rapidly escalate into a contentious issue among riparian countries

NEERAJ SINGH MANHAS



The India-China standoff at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh has entered its fourth winter. Meanwhile, bilateral relations have remained in an "abnormal state" since the 2020 Galwan clashes. Bringing back normalcy could be a long and complex process, as issues of divergence between the two countries go beyond the disputed border due to water disputes which have been a topic of significant contention for a prolonged period.

Water resources are commonly perceived as a communal asset that ought to be utilised for the collective good. However, in actuality, the growing supply-demand gap in water availability has the potential to rapidly escalate into a contentious issue among the riparian countries. The exacerbation of tensions over water resources in India and China can be attributed to their intricate political relations and persistent border conflicts.

Dams Galore

The construction of dams and hydropower projects by China on the Brahmaputra River (Yarlung Zangbo) has generated apprehension in India regarding the possible ramifications on water flow downstream. Over 87,000 dams have been built across China, including in Tibet — a significant number of these dams are situated on India-shared international waterways.

India is reviving its 12 hydropower projects, which are expected to generate 11,517 megawatts of energy along the border and cost around $15.3 billion. On the Chinese side, a 'super dam' is under construction on Tibet's Yarlung Tsangpo. The Indian government has made allegations against China for insufficient sharing of hydrological data about the upstream region of transboundary rivers, thereby aggravating the tensions between the two nations.

Riparian Relations

The contested LAC, which is nearly 3,440 km long, and its shifting nature as a result of rivers, lakes and snowcaps have led to confrontations at various spots. India and China's riparian ties and their border conflict cannot be delinked, the fact that their close geographic proximity and overlapping territories often affect both these issues. The shared geographical backdrop of the disputed border regions and the rivers that originate from those areas provide the link between the two, and this is where the connection can be found.

Many people in these border areas are dependent on agriculture and pastoralism for their livelihoods. The fragile ecosystems of the Himalayas are particularly vulnerable to such pressures, which leads to long-term changes in water availability and quality for downstream states. In the context of riparian relations, the upper riparian states always assert that they have the 'absolute territorial sovereignty' to use rivers for their own purposes without consulting the lower riparian states. This can be seen in the case of the Nile River basin, Mekong River basin and Indus River basin. The lower riparian states, on the other hand, uphold the idea of 'absolute territorial integrity' of rivers, while highlighting that the acts of the upper riparian states should not hurt the flow of water farther downstream.

Water Laws

It is important to note that China was one of the three nations that did not accept the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses in 1997. China's reasons for not accepting the UN Convention are complex and multifaceted. This indicates that China does not wish to be bound by international accords on the distribution of water resources. Also, China does not have any formal water-sharing arrangements with the countries in its immediate vicinity. Instead, China tends to perceive water as a strategic resource and a tool for use in the formation of its policies regarding the surrounding regions.

China is in a position to exercise control and leverage over the water resources it commands as a result of its "fortunate position" as a nation located in an upper riparian region. The lower riparian states can also have a command over a relatively less powerful upper riparian nation. This can be a powerful deterrent, as the upper riparian states will be reluctant to do anything that could jeopardise their water supply.

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India is located in a middle riparian location, which makes it more reliant on the headwaters of rivers like the Brahmaputra, Indus and Sutlej, all of which are fed by the Tibetan plateau. Because of this dependence, India is at a greater risk of experiencing water scarcity. The rivers and their resources are more difficult to manage as a result of this territorial dispute. The Indus and the Sutlej flow on the western side, while the Brahmaputra flows on the eastern side. Chinese hydrologists, however, claim that the Brahmaputra has a sufficient supply of water and would not have a substantial impact on India.

Furthermore, India's concerns continue to centre on the release of floodwater during the monsoon season rather than a lack of available water. However, most rivers become fatter after they are joined by tributaries and fed by precipitation in the plains, according to data. This is because the tributaries add more water to the river, and the precipitation in the plains also adds to the river's flow.

Working Together

The potential for cooperation between India and China on the Brahmaputra River must primarily focus on reducing the severity of floods and investigating the possibility of jointly producing hydroelectric power. It is important to have hydrological data that is accurate and collected consistently for efficient transboundary water arrangements.

The importance of India and China working together to improve the channels for sharing data and generating data is mentioned in the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2002 and renewed in 2008, 2013 and 2018. Similarly, an MoU on the Sutlej River was signed in 2004 and updated in 2010 and 2015. Under these MoUs, China shares real-time data with India on water levels, discharge and rainfall from hydrological stations along the two rivers during the flood season (June-October). India uses this data to better manage its water supplies and reduce the risk of flooding. Though both MoUs expired in 2023, China continues to provide data on Sutlej. The two countries are now in the process of renewing their MoUs.

It is necessary to make diplomatic efforts, engage in constructive discourse and have the political will to find solutions that are mutually acceptable to resolve water and border problems. International mediation, implementation of confidence-building measures and drafting of agreements are essential to successfully resolve conflicts. Both countries must handle concerns linked to water in a transparent manner to restore confidence and ease tensions.

(The author is Special Advisor, South Asia, at Parley Policy Initiative, Republic of Korea. Views are personal)

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A manifesto for water use

WAY AHEAD. Politicians promise grandiose projects for parched regions, whereas decentralised solutions are needed

MUSTAFAH KK

KJ JOY

Come election time, candidates of every political hue promise water to the people. Such promises reverberate through the constituencies, especially the drought prone ones as also the cities.

Water scarcity is everywhere — rural as well as urban. Maharashtra reports that almost all of its reservoirs are getting empty. The Sangli and Satara district administration issued prohibitory orders to stop water theft as the water crisis in these two districts deepens. Twenty-seven blocks in Maharashtra are witnessing a groundwater drought — deficiency in groundwater levels and availability — says Groundwater Survey and Development Agency (GSDA) report for the month of March. Bengaluru's water crisis is a subject of discussion everywhere. After the elections everybody, including those who get elected on the promise, forget about it. Till the next elections.

SUPPLY SIDE OPTIONS

Election promises are always about supply side options. They are all about ways of getting more and more water to the area — whether it is for agriculture in the rural areas or drinking water to the cities. Substantive issues in the water sector like sustainable use, equitable access and participatory governance never become part of the election agenda. The imagination is about getting water from longer distances, sometimes hundreds of kilometres. Or getting water from centralised, mega projects. Today, even to provide decentralised and dispersed needs, for example domestic water needs that would require 5-6 per cent of available water, the governments build centralised water grids and huge water infrastructures.

The gigantic Mission Bhagiratha with a financial outlay of ₹42,853 crore, initiated by the previous Government of Telangana to provide drinking water to the State, is an example of this. At the national level there is the 'Jal Jeevan Mission' to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections to all households in rural India by 2024 with the attractive slogan '*har ghar jal*' (water in every house). There is cynicism creeping in about this very ambitious infrastructure project. Will it bring taps but no water?

'HYDRAULIC MISSION' PROBLEMS

The imagination of the political class is about large water infrastructure, often called the hydraulic mission mode. It emerged as a distinctive approach to water towards the end of the 19th century in the West. It got fully developed as a system in the 20th century. Large dams, power generation and huge transmission networks and large-scale water resource development are the outcomes of this approach. Interlinking of rivers (ILR) takes the hydraulic mission approach to newer heights. It is worth noting that the West, where the hydraulic mission mode originated, has long given it up for more ecologically sustainable options.

ALTERNATIVE WATER AGENDA

The Vikalp Sangam manifesto sets a radically different agenda for water. It says that water policies and programmes should have the following sequential water use prioritisation: water for life (drinking, washing, sanitation, livestock, wildlife), ecosystem needs and functions, livelihoods (including food production), adaptation to changes (climate, land use, livelihoods, etc), and industrial/infrastructural use.

There is a need to disaggregate water use taking place under the rubric of domestic water between lifeline and luxury uses in the urban areas. There is a need to curb luxury and wasteful uses. There are no curbs presently on water from the rural areas and from agriculture getting re-allocated to the cities.

There is a need to disaggregate water use taking place under the rubric of domestic water between lifeline and luxury uses in the urban areas.

This is happening everywhere in India. Maharashtra has been in the lead. The Prayas Resources and Livelihoods Group study report (2013) shows diversion of agriculture water to non-irrigation purposes, especially to meet urban domestic water needs, between 2003 and 2010 was to the tune of about 2000 Mm3 (million cubic meter) from 51 dams. This seems to have reduced the irrigation potential by about 323,300 ha. More water entering cities does not guarantee water to the urban poor. They continue to depend on informal water markets and tankers. Interestingly, there is no articulation coming up from our cities saying that the cites can do with much less water.

There is tremendous scope to reduce water footprint. Take the case of thermal power plants in the country. They take up the highest proportion of industrial water used. Indian thermal power plants are one of the most inefficient when it comes to water used per unit power produced. It has been estimated that by converting all thermal power plants from once-through open-loop to closed-cycle cooling systems using recycled water, about 65,000 million litres per day of fresh water can be saved.

WATER CONSERVATION

Agriculture accounts for 80-85 per cent of total water use. Within agriculture, rice, wheat and sugarcane account for the bulk of water use. There are many promising agronomical practices that are being promoted especially by civil society organisations across the country around these crops that can result in large water savings. System of Rice Intensification (SRI) in the case of Rice and Sustainable Sugar Initiative (SSI) are examples of these.

In India the gap between Irrigation Potential Created (IPC) and Irrigation Potential Utilised (IPU) has been increasing mainly since the Sixth Five Year Plan period (1980-85). NITI Aayog estimates the gap presently to be about 24 million hectares. Amongst other reasons, one important reason is the absence of water distribution system; and even if the system is there it is in a state of perpetual disrepair. Bridging this gap can ensure water to large rainfed areas without going for new dams.

The emphasis should be on soft options. It means prioritisation of decentralised harvesting and governance over mega-projects and centralised governance, with appropriate combinations of traditional and modern knowledge. This requires support for regeneration, restoration, and de-polluting of wetlands and water sources and the regeneration and conservation of their catchments. Are politicians listening?

The writer is part of SOPPECOM, Vikalp Sangam and Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India