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37 yrs on, Sangli villages await Maha irrigation scheme even as K'taka dam waters their fields

The Maha-Karnataka border row has been a political tool for parties in both states for decades—from water issues to linguistic affiliations, to laying claims over territories on the other side & to cultural skirmishes. The first report in a two-part series looks at how water politics in Jat taluka in Sangli has triggered the latest war of words between top politicians

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Jat (Sangli): For the 3,300-odd residents of Tikondi village, the water that irrigates their fields comes from Karnataka's "generosity".

Mahadeo Hadimani had lived with water scarcity all his life. It changed in 1988 when overflowing ponds and check dams in Karnataka raised water levels in his borewell. "A decade ago, I had dug a few borewells, one as deep as 1,200ft, which gave half an inch of water to quench our thirst."

"But water in this borewell has risen to 200ft in the last couple of years after the Karnataka government released water through canals," Hadimani said.

A festering and unaddressed water issue is among a host of problems at the heart of the Maharashtra-Karnataka border row that flairs up again and again.

Farmers in 42 villages of Jat taluka bordering Karnataka have been waiting for over three decades now for the Maharashtra government to expand the Mhaisai lift irrigation scheme to benefit their farms.

Borewells barely provide drinking water; let alone irrigate their fields of bajra and tur. Across the border, barely 10km away, Karnataka's Al-

matti dam on Krishna river floods canals with ample water that benefits acres of farmland.

Farmers' resentment flared up again this week and 42 villages passed resolutions, like in 2016, to join Karnataka. It set off a war of words between the two states.

Karnataka chief minister Basavaraj Bommai said his government was "seriously considering" a resolution to include Jat taluka in the state. Maharashtra's deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnis declared that not a single village of Maharashtra would be ceded to Karnataka. Other political parties were quick to strike down Bommai's claims.

Jat taluka farmers said the Maharashtra government had failed them and their demand for expansion of the Mhaisai lift irrigation scheme has fallen on deaf ears.

Most Tikondi villagers are Kannada-speaking and have relatives across the border, who contact "influential" people there and get water released into the canals for their farms.

Sunil Shinde (31) of Umadi village graduated from Solapur university with a biotechnology degree but could not land a job. He returned to help in the fields. His father had dug 11 borewells on their six-

acre farm. They were bone dry. "After water started flowing into the nearby canals, all the 11 borewells filled up. I stopped looking for a job and joined my father. We grow grapes and other horticulture crops," Shinde said.

Residents of these villages said Almati dam helps drought-prone regions on both sides of the border. Since 2019, the Krishna basin in Maharashtra has received heavy rainfall, filling the dam.

Karnataka's Tubachi-Babeshwar lift irrigation scheme commissioned four years ago also helps them. Check dams and canals in this scheme overflow and bring water to some Jat villages and they benefit from the natural flow.

Maharashtra's Mhaisai irrigation project was started in 1985. It lifts water from Krishna river's left bank in Mhaisai town of Miraj taluka and provides it to the drought-prone areas of Sangli and Solapur districts.

The water is lifted 600m and flown through canals dotted with check dams, irrigating 81,000 hectares up to Utagi, 100km from Mhaisai. Farmers want the canal system extended another 50km to help 65 villages in Jat get 6,000 million cubic feet of water.

Sunil Potdar, chief convenor of Pani Sangharsh Sam-

iti, an outfit fighting for water for the 42 villages, said Karnataka may not release water in the canals adjoining the border forever.

"They do it unofficially and only if they have excess water. They know that this water will ultimately flow through the canals into Bhori river, which is in their jurisdiction. What happens if the monsoon misses the Krishna basin in Karnataka? We need a permanent solution, which lies in the expansion of the Mhaisai lift irrigation scheme," Potdar said.

Resolutions to join Karnataka were part of pressure tactics stemming from decades of neglect by Maharashtra, he added.

"We thank the Karnataka chief minister for taking up the issue once again. It forced the Maharashtra government to send one of its ministers to meet us. We have told him that if the budget for expansion of the irrigation scheme is not approved in the coming assembly session and work does not start by January-end, we will meet the Karnataka chief minister and hand over the resolutions, requesting him to make us part of his state," he Potdar said.

(Tomorrow: Villagers in Jat taluka want jobs, seeds, roads and hospitals)

GROUNDWELL OF DISCONTENT



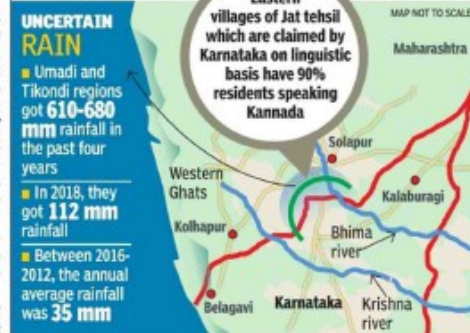
The road from Maharashtra's Umadi village towards Chadchan town in Karnataka is used by hundreds from both the states every day

► The Mhaisai irrigation scheme was launched in 1985 to lift water from the Krishna river into the left-bank canal located in Mhaisai town and bring the water to the drought-prone areas of Sangli and Solapur districts

► At present, the water is effectively lifted up by 600 metres and passes through canals dotted with check-dams. It is irrigating 81,000 hectares

► The network of canals has reached till Utagi in Jat taluka, which is 100km from Mhaisai

► Villagers living along the border want the canal network to be expanded for another 50km so that the water can reach them



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Amar Ujala- 11- December-2022

कार्यकर्ताओं ने की यमुना घाट की सफाई

नई दिल्ली। ट्री क्रेज फाउंडेशन के महत्वपूर्ण कार्यक्रम 'मेरी यमुना मेरे घाट' के कार्यकर्ताओं ने शनिवार को यमुना घाट की सफाई की। इसमें टीसीएफए, भूमि गुप और दीन दयाल कॉलेज के कार्यकर्ताओं ने हिस्सा लिया। इस दौरान पॉलिथीन, प्लास्टिक की बोतल, पूजन सामग्री इत्यादि साफ की गई। सफाई अभियान में शामिल लोगों ने कहा कि घाट को पूरी तरह से साफ रखने के लिए विषैले केमिकल का यमुना में प्रवाह रोकना होगा। लोगों को नदियों में पूजा का सामान या खाली बोतल फेंकने से बचना होगा। ट्री क्रेज की सीईओ भावना ने कहा कि हम सभी इसको साफ रखने के लिए भरपूर प्रयास कर रहे हैं। लोगों की थोड़ी सी जागरुकता से नदियों को बचाया जा सकता है। अभियान का नेतृत्व राजन ने किया वहीं प्रतीक, नवीन, नितिन और आयुष ने अहम भूमिका निभाई। ब्यूरो