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The Times of India - 14- January-2024

# Depleting reservoir water levels raise alarm on summer crisis

Adequate Storage To Meet Demand, Says Official

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**Bengaluru:** Karnataka's reservoirs are facing a critical decline in water levels, heightening concerns of an impending severe shortage of drinking water during the upcoming summer months. This alarming situation is attributed to one of the most severe droughts the state has experienced —in over 125 years—last year.

Data provided by the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Management Centre (KSNDC) indicates that a majority of the 11 major reservoirs in the Cauvery and Krishna basins are currently holding less than 40% of their storage capacities.

Key reservoirs like Harangi, Hemavathy, Kabini, and Krishna Raja Sagar (KRS), which play a pivotal role in supplying drinking water to major cities and towns in the Old-Mysuru region, including Bengaluru, collectively possess only 51 tmcft of water compared to their gross capacity storage of 115 tmcft.

## DROPS OF CONCERN

Cauvery basin			Total capacity (in tmcft)	Krishna basin		
Harangi	8.5	3.4		Bhadra	71.5	35
Hemavathi	37	15		Tungabhadra	105	10
KRS	49.4	19.5		Ghatapraoha	51	35
Kabini	19.5	13		Malaprabha	37	15
				Alamtti	123	54
			Existing storage (in tmcft)	Narayanapura	33	21



ge of 115 tmcft.

Similarly, seven reservoirs in the Krishna basin, including Bhadra, Vani Vilas, Tungabhadra, Ghataprabha, Malaprabha, Almatti, and Narayanpur, are facing a shortfall, with only 173 tmcft of water against their gross capacity of 422 tmcft. Last year, the reservoirs in the Cauvery and Krishna basins had storage levels of 81 tmcft and 331 tmcft, respectively.

Officials from KSNMDC anticipate a further dip in water levels as the summer season approaches, exacerbated by evaporation. They highlight that, on average,

one tmcft of water evaporates from both basins during summer. Of particular concern is KRS reservoir in Mandya, a crucial water source for Bengaluru, currently holding 19.5 tmcft of water. While this raises worries about an impending drinking water crisis, authorities claim that the existing storage is sufficient to meet the city's needs.

Suresh B, chief engineer at Bengaluru Water Supply & Sewerage Board, said: "We need about 12 tmcft of water to meet Bengaluru's drinking water needs till June-end. So with the existing sto-

rage, we can easily see off summer. There is no need to worry."

Acknowledging the gravity of the situation, the state government has instructed the dam authorities not to release water for irrigation. Additionally, a call for judicious use of available water

has been emphasised. Srinivas Reddy, adviser at KSNMDC, said all regional commissioners have been instructed to monitor water storage in reservoirs within their jurisdictions and utilise water exclusively for drinking purposes until the arrival of the next monsoon.

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# Polavaram threat to State: Expert

**Says high time the backwater issue was addressed in earnest**

D CHANDRA BHASKAR RAO  
HYDERABAD

Telangana is facing a lurking threat in the form of Polavaram backwaters.

With extreme weather events occurring more often on account of climate change, it is high time that the Polavaram backwater issue is addressed in earnest, stressed a senior officer from the Central pool associated with the operations of the river boards. In an informal conversation with 'Telangana Today', the officer, who sought anonymity said the onus now rests on the Central Water Commission to sensitise the government of Andhra Pradesh as well as the Polavaram Project Authority (PPA) on the issue.

There is mounting evidence of abnormal occurrences such as flash floods in the Godavari basin too. The government of Telangana has presented its case sufficiently before the Central Water Commission with

**“ Even though we presented evidence that some 900 acres of land in Telangana was facing the risk of submergence with the backwaters of the Polavaram at its FRL of 150 ft, AP did not relent**

— OFFICIAL

substantiating proof of the flood havoc caused by the Polavaram backwater in Bhadrachalam district in 2022. Even in July last, Venkatapur mandal in Mulugu district, part of the Godavari catchment, witnessed a flash flood with the area receiving an unprecedented rainfall of 64.9 cm within 24 hours.

This is neither the first phenomenon of this kind nor will it be the last, he felt. The CWC directed the PPA to convene a meeting of AP and TS in April last and wanted it to help resolve the issue. The CWC asked the PPA and the Andhra government to survey the impact of the backwaters of the

Polavaram project in Telangana. The officials of Telangana wanted the CWC to recognise the submergence in Telangana when water was stored at Polavaram at full reservoir level.

But nothing much has happened so far. At a meeting organised in Delhi on the backwaters issue last year, the officials from Telangana voiced concern over the inordinate delay in AP surveying the impact of backwaters. But the neighbouring State remained unmoved on the issue. The TS officials pressed for a fresh public hearing on the issue. They wanted all possible steps to be taken to save the Bhadrachalam temple and

the Manuguru Heavy Water Plant, a vital installation. They also insisted that AP should not resort to impounding water in the project till the submergence area was identified by conducting a joint survey.

Andhra Pradesh, however, contended that the submergence area was already identified and compensation was also paid. There is no issue left to be resolved. A senior officer of the Telangana Irrigation Department said the CWC had conducted three to four meetings as directed by the Supreme Court on the issue.

“Even though we presented evidence that some 900 acres of the area were facing the risk of submergence with the backwaters of the Polavaram at its FRL of 150 ft, AP did not relent,” he added. The stalemate has continued for the last two seasons. But the Ministry of Jal Shakti has failed to help resolve the issue, the officials pointed out.



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# Near-complete dam of Ken-Betwa project yet to get environmental nod

**Jacob Koshy**

NEW DELHI

A major dam project of the Madhya Pradesh government, which is part of the Centre's marquee Ken-Betwa river interlinking project, was found to be in violation of environment clearance laws by an expert committee of the Union Environment Ministry, *The Hindu* has learnt from a perusal of publicly available documents.

The Centre has invoked a set of controversial orders whose legality is being examined by the Supreme Court. The sequence of events demonstrates the confusion among the States in interpreting the Centre's environment clearance processes and how this results in *ad-hoc* fixes being applied as amends.

In 2019, the Madhya Pradesh government began constructing the Lower Orr dam - part of the second phase of the Centre's ambitious Ken-Betwa river interlinking project - only to be told by an expert ap-



**In hope:** The Ken-Betwa interlinking project involves transferring surplus water from the Ken river to the Betwa. FILE PHOTO

praisal committee (EAC), tasked with assessing the environmental impact of projects, in 2022 that the State had not taken a formal clearance from the Environment Ministry for the project. The expert committee, in December 2022, recommended that the Environment Ministry "consider taking necessary action on the violation against the project proponent as per law".

The project proponent here was the National Water Development Agency (NWDA), a Jal Shakti Ministry body. Following a site visit, the committee reported that about 82% of

the dam and 33.5% of the canal network had been completed without a clearance from the Ministry. The NWDA also did not have a 'consent to operate' certificate.

The EAC recommended that the project developers undertake a fresh environment appraisal process, assess the ecological damage that had ensued and lay out a 'damage restoration' plan. These recommendations derive from a slew of executive orders issued by the Environment Ministry in 2017, 2021 and 2022 whereby a standard operating procedure was put in place to allow companies -

private and State-led - who had violated the terms of their environment clearance or were operating without one, to legalise their activities.

Along with the fresh set of conditions, the new orders required companies to pay a fine that worked out to a percentage of the cost and turnover of the commissioned projects.

Nearly a year after this recommendation, in a meeting of the EAC in December 2023, the body recommended that the Lower Orr project be subject to a fresh evaluation and that the NWDA submit more data calculating the potential damage that may have ensued from the construction. The Supreme Court, on January 2 this year, put all orders of the Ministry on hold as part of the proceedings in another case filed by NGO Vanshakti where such post-facto clearances accorded to mining companies have been challenged. The next hearing of this case is scheduled in four weeks.