

The Times of India- 22- November-2022

# How Bihar is closing the gap with rich states in rural water supply

In Just Three Years Since 2019, The Share Of Households Covered Has Officially Risen From 1.9% To 96%. **Atul Thakur** Does A Reality Check

**TIMES** Special

**B**ihar made a prodigious leap in tap-water coverage, from 1.9% in 2019 to 87% in 2021. The state government said it had provided 1.5 crore connections under its 'Har Ghar Nal Ka Jal' scheme, in addition to the 8.4 lakh provided under the Centre's 'Har Ghar Jal' scheme. This year, the coverage has "officially" improved to 96%, putting Bihar in the same league as Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Only seven states and UTs, including Haryana and Gujarat, have 100% coverage.

## Ground Realities

In August 2021, TOI started tracking three villages in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district to correlate their official status with the ground reality. Per the Centre's dashboard, Balara Ismail village, about 25km from Muzaffarpur city, had 100% tap-water coverage. While there was an overhead water tank on a mound amid waterlogged fields there, the only purpose it served was as a tether for a cow.

Residents Lakkhi Paswan, Mahadev Paswan and Ranjeet Kumar said the tank had been dry since its construction in 2018. Mahadev had a pipeline running to his house, Lakkhi didn't, and as if to corroborate their claims, a three-wheeler pick-up arrived with a cargo of 20-litre water bottles and a large water tank.

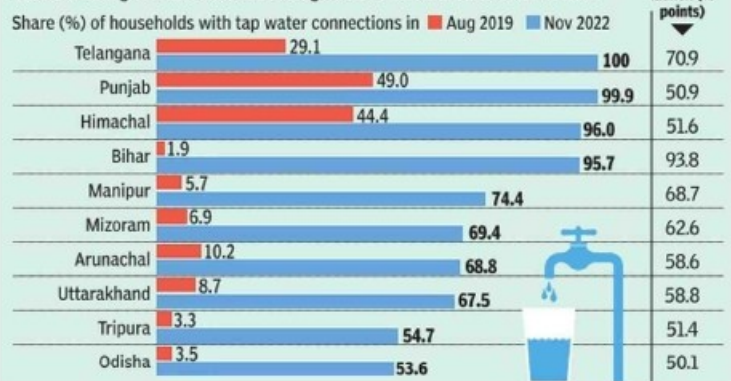
Sonbarsha Shah village between Muzaffarpur and Balara Ismail got water twice a day for half an hour each, but it was not very useful as most houses did not have tanks.

In Madhubani village near the Muzaffarpur-Chhapra highway, Chandeshwar Pandit and his wife Radha Devi complained about the poor quality and erratic timings of water supply. They still depended on their old hand pump beside the new tap for drinking, cooking and most other household chores.

The Bihar government disputed TOI's ground report and argued the random selection of villages was "unscientific". Nevertheless, by September the situation had improved in Balara Ismail. Seeing other houses connected, Lakkhi Paswan was confident that he would get tap water soon, but the residents of Sonbarsha Shah and Madhubani reported no improvement.

## BIHAR SAW BIGGEST JUMP IN COVERAGE

States with highest increase in coverage since launch of Jal Jeevan Mission



## Things Get Better For Most

So, a year on, TOI revisited these villages in October 2022. Chandeshwar Pandit's house in Madhubani was our first stop and, sadly, the tap outside his house has been dry since May this year. Pandit said the quality of water had improved before the supply was suddenly stopped. Being a casual labourer he had been unable to find out the reason for the disruption.

In Sonbarsha Shah, the cigarette kiosk owner this paper had spoken to last year could not be contacted, but Dilip Kumar Singh, who had come visiting from the neighbouring Muhammadpur Alam village, said the quantity and quality of water supply were satisfactory.

"The water from my hand pump had a metallic taste, which is not there in the tap water," said Singh. He gets water thrice a day for two hours each, "in the morning, afternoon and evening," and has an overhead tank to make the water last through the day.

In Balara Ismail, Mahadev Paswan's wife Kusma Devi was also happy with the water supply: Their house is nearest to the tank, so they turn the village's supply on and off. "The water is good and safer to drink than hand pump water," Devi said.

Mehdi Paswan, another Balara Ismail resident, said he was happy with the thrice-a-day supply as it spared them the toil over the hand pump. "We don't have storage but we have organised our routine

around the supply hours. We use the water for drinking, washing and also for growing vegetables in our backyard."

Lakkhi Paswan hadn't got his tap, though. Mahadev said about 10% of the households in Balara Ismail remained unconnected. "There are several issues. Some people don't allow pipes through their fields. In Lakkhi's case, his house is next to a road and the contractor has neither the equipment nor the authority to dig through the road to install pipes."

This time a visit to Akhtiarapur and Panapur villages in Marwan block, and Bishunpur Anant aka Uphraul village near Vaisali's Buddhist stupa showed that each village had the physical infrastructure of water supply, but with its own unique problems.

Clearly, running an efficient water supply system is as tricky for the administration as building the infrastructure for it. "Under the maintenance policy, Rs 24,000 is annually provided to each ward to do repair and maintenance work," said Muzaffarpur district magistrate Pranav Kumar.

These niggles aside, the water infrastructure has created a demand for clean and regular water supply in Bihar's villages, and will have an impact on people's quality of life. DM Kumar said, "The district administration also runs special schemes to include the small proportion of people who were somehow left behind."

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Millennium Post- 22- November-2022

# Haryana CS Kaushal reviews progress of Rs 16K crore projects

**CHANDIGARH:** Haryana Chief Secretary Sanjeev Kaushal, on Monday, disclosed that three districts of Haryana namely Ambala, Rohtak, and Faridabad have been declared as front runners in tap connection coverage (100 per cent) under the Jal Jeevan Survekshan 2022-23 conducted by the Government of India. While Ambala has secured the first place, the second place was secured by Rohtak and third position by district Faridabad.

This was disclosed by Kaushal in the meeting of the Committee of Administrative Secretaries, held here to review projects worth more than Rs. 100 crore. About 54 projects worth more than Rs. 100 crore each of 10 departments including technical education, power, public health engineering, civil aviation, public works (B&R)



**Chief Secretary Sanjeev Kaushal holds a review meeting in Chandigarh on Monday** MPOST

and architecture, health & family welfare, medical education and research, irrigation and water resources, cooperation and home were discussed in the meeting. The total cost of all projects was around Rs. 16,000 crore.

The Chief Secretary said that the speedy completion of big projects is one of the priorities of Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. MPOST

# Narmada waters creating ripples in arid Kutch despite hiccups

**SOURAV ROY BARMAN**

MANDVI (KUTCH), NOV 21

THE NEARLY 150 families in Mod Kuba, a remote village on the edge of the Arabian Sea in Kutch district, prefer to retire early given that they start their day at dawn.

But July 7 this year was no ordinary day for the residents of Mod Kuba, which marks the tail-end of the 357-km-long Kutch Branch Canal (KBC) of the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) on the Narmada river, among the centrepieces of the BJP's campaign narrative in poll-bound Gujarat.

Under a shimmering moon,



The last stretch of the 357-km Kutch Branch Canal of the Sardar Sarovar Project at Mod Kuba. *Sourav Roy Barman*

as water started flowing through the Narmada canal around midnight, the villagers rejoiced, breaking into loud cheers and

setting off firecrackers.

"We wanted to celebrate the moment we waited for months

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## • Narmada waters creating ripples in arid Kutch

and years," says 68-year-old Kiritbhai Bhanushali, who places his support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi above his loyalty for the BJP since its Jan Sangh days.

But their joy was short-lived, with a section of the canal near the village developing a breach within 24 hours.

"In July, water was released as part of a test to assess the structural safety of the canal, which was delayed due to land acquisition issues. Later, the breaches were identified and repaired," says a top official of the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd (SSNNL).

On August 28, the Prime Minister officially inaugurated

the KBC, which is a branch of the Narmada Main Canal (NMC), which originates at Kevadia. The water supply, however, has again come to a halt in the canal due to another "breach", say villagers.

"There was an accident in which a few youths drowned in the canal recently, forcing us to stop the flow of water. Also, the Rabi sowing season has just started. Water will be released in phases based on assessment of aggregate demand from a number of areas at a time," says the SSNNL official.

For the ruling BJP, in the belts of Mod Kuba and the adjoining areas, which come under the Mandvi Assembly constituency

that will vote on December 1, such hiccups seem to have been overshadowed by the popular appeal enjoyed by the PM.

"If Narendrabhai has delivered the (Sardar Sarovar) dam and the canal, he will ensure that we get water regularly as well. It is a matter of time," says a local electrician, Arvind Bhai Khatri, blaming the Congress for the delay in completion of the project.

The narrative is taking root at a time the BJP has started targeting the Congress over the presence of social activist and Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar – who led a movement against the SSP on the grounds of mass displacement

and ecological destruction – at the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra in Maharashtra recently.

Bagged by the BJP during the last three state polls, Mandvi is among the six Assembly constituencies of Kutch district, which has a population density of only 46 per sq km. Like in other parts of the state, Mandvi is also witnessing a triangular contest this time due to the entry of the AAP.

And much like in Mandvi, the commissioning of the canal dominates poll chatter across Kutch. At the Bhachau taluka, through which the canal enters Kutch, many residents claim they are determined, "more than ever before", to vote for the BJP due to the KBC.