

Deccan Herald- 25- September-2021

NGT on Mekedatu: Top court refrains from passing order on TN plea

**Reserves verdict on
suo motu powers
of green tribunal**

NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Supreme Court on Friday refrained from passing any order on Tamil Nadu government's plea against the National Green Tribunal's order closing the suo motu proceedings related to formation of a committee on proposed Mekedatu balancing reservoir and drinking water project with an estimate cost of Rs 5,912 crore.

A bench, presided over by Justice A M Khanwilkar, said the petition, filed by Tamil Nadu, would be considered after the pronouncement of judgement on suo motu power of the NGT.

The top court had separately reserved the judgement on legal issue whether the NGT could exercise suo motu jurisdiction under the 2010 Act, on the basis of a letter or news report.

On Friday, senior advocate Shekhar Naphade appeared for Tamil Nadu and senior counsel Shyam Divan for Karnataka.

The state of Tamil Nadu was aggrieved by the order by the green tribunal passed on June 17, 2021.

The tribunal at New Delhi had then allowed a review application by Karnataka against Southern bench's order forming joint committee for inspection on the basis of a news report on preliminary works allegedly being undertaken for the project.

In its plea, Tamil Nadu said that the tribunal failed to con-

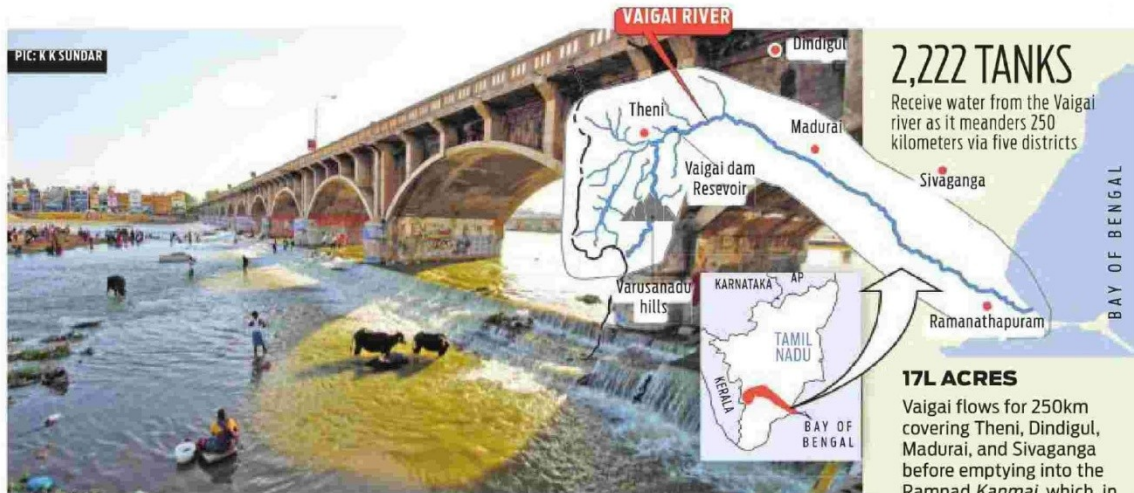
sider the environmental damage likely to be caused by the continuation of the construction works which involved large extent of reserve forests and wildlife sanctuaries.

It also contended that tribunal erred in holding that the issue was sub-judice before the top court which, in fact pertained to the grant of permission for conducting a feasibility report and the detailed project report.

"The issue involved in the NGT was regard to the alleged initiation of activities in reserved forest without any clearances," it said.

The state government further said the principal NGT bench proceeded to hear the review application, instead of relegating the applicant state of Karnataka to southern bench which passed the order under review.





JEYALAKSHMI RAMANUJAM
@ Madurai

FROM its origin on the Varusanadu Hills in Theni till its end in the great lake of Ramanathapuram, the Vaigai nurtures everything on its path. But, sand mining and pollution are threatening the very existence of this fabled river.

According to sources, sand mining has devastated the river's ability to heal itself. "The river now lacks sufficient sand deposits to repair itself. What's more, it's 20 feet deep at several locations. This, coupled with climate change, is a major threat to the existence of the river and the city of Madurai," said R Seenivasan, Advisor, PRADAN Tank Programme, an NGO that carries out studies on rivers in India.

The immediate effect of riverbed deepening is felt on irrigation and water supply as the mouths of most canals are now above the riverbed. "Vaigai has 141 canals, most of which have already been destroyed owing to poor maintenance, affecting water supply," said Seenivasan. Deepening of the river has also affected groundwater levels, which now lies at 500 feet below the surface.

GREED, APATHY DIG GRAVE FOR FABLED VAIGAI

Sand mining and pollution threaten the river, a critical water source for 5 districts

As for pollution, the Vaigai starts getting polluted as it passes through Madurai City. Sewage and effluent flow directly into the river, sources said. Officials, however, said mitigation efforts have been taken. Sewage channels emptying into the Vaigai in Ma-



durai city have been identified and removed over the past two years following High Court directions, said Veera Kathiravan, Additional Advocate General III of Tamil Nadu and chairman of a committee appointed by the Madras High Court.

"Though sewage discharge into the Vaigai from Madurai

city has been controlled, we have identified a similar problem in Paramakudi city. Officials have been instructed to establish a sewage treatment plant to address it," he said.

Karthikeyan Karimuttu, Executive Engineer (PWD), Mulaivaigai Basin, spoke about the various steps taken to restore water in Mulaivaigai. The construction of a check dam at a cost of ₹4.2 crore would commence at Kadamalaikundu in February. Proposals to construct two more check dams at Valliparai (Varusanadu) and Solaidevan have been sent to the State government, he said.

M Rajan, Coordinator of Vaigai Nadhi Makkal Iyyakkam, said roads on both sides of the river have narrowed it in Arapalayam and near the Thiagarajar Arts College in Madurai city. Two

2,222 TANKS

Receive water from the Vaigai river as it meanders 250 kilometers via five districts

17L ACRES

Vaigai flows for 250km covering Theni, Dindigul, Madurai, and Sivaganga before emptying into the Ramnad Kanmai, which, in turn, enters the Bay of Bengal at Devipattinam. Along its course, the river irrigates around 17 lakh acres of agricultural land

Inscriptions

Inscription belonging to the eighth century describe how Vaigai water was used for cultivation. Many literary works from the Sangam era, including Pari padal Madurai Kanji, describe the benevolence and the beauty of the Vaigai with geographical evidence

check dams have also been constructed in Opulapadithurai in violation of hydrology rules. These are causing floods and traffic congestion in the localities, he said. "Also, sand is being mined at Villangudi and transported in bullock carts. Officials are turning a blind eye to this issue," he said.

But, V Sugumaran, Executive Engineer of PWD, WRO, Periyar-Vaigai Basin Division, refuted that sand is being mined at Villangudi in Madurai, but assured he would check.

Ahead of World Rivers Day on September 26, TNIE looks at the problems plaguing the rivers flowing through TN.

The Statesman- 25- September-2021

Floods in Balasore , another depression brewing

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BALASORE, 24 SEPTEMBER:

Several villages of north Balasore including Bhograi, Baliapal and Basta block were marooned as flood waters of Subarnarekha and Jalaka river entered the villages, crop land and disconnected road communication.

At least 100 villages entailing a population of 1.5 lakh are affected by the floods. Water was flowing at a height of three feet on rural roads and vast stretch of crop land submerged.

First it was the rain water that had flooded villages last week and now it is the river water that has added to the miseries of the people in the north Balasore villages.

District authorities said they had evacuated over 3000 people from low lying areas and put them up in cyclone shel-

ters. The ODRAF and fire services teams were engaged in rescue and relief operation.

Another low pressure in the Bay of Bengal is likely to concentrate into a depression and move towards Odisha during the next 48 hours stated the IMD on Friday while issuing yellow warning to several coastal Odisha districts.

Under its influence, there will be fairly widespread light to moderate rainfall activity with isolated heavy falls from September 25 and 28. Also widespread light to moderate rainfall activity with scattered heavy to very heavy (12-20 cm) with isolated extremely heavy falls (>20 cm) is very likely on September 26 and 27 in some districts of Odisha, the IMD said.

Fishermen have been advised against venturing into the deep sea.

Business Standard- 25- September-2021

BREAKFAST WITH BS ► GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT | JAL SHAKTI MINISTER

Free flowing

Aditi Phadnis finds in Shekhawat a minister who keeps both oars in the water

It's been raining all night. I've had to tippy-toe through rivulets ankle-high to reach Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Shekhawat on a day *jal* is out in its full *shakti*. "Land! Blessed land!" I cry out to myself as I navigate to the pavement, sodden and muddy, making my unsteady way to the gate of his residence on Akbar Road in Lutyens' Delhi. My *chappals* squelch and squeak. He emits a startled squawk when he sees me, asks his aides to turn down the air conditioner and confides that he took the Metro to return home from the airport the previous evening. "At least in the Metro, you know exactly how much time the journey is going to take. Stupid to use the car in weather like this," he says. He apparently uses the Metro a lot.

Unconventional. But then everything about Shekhawat, 53, is unconventional. His managers complain with affectionate exasperation that he throws security to the wind while meeting people. No matter what time of the day or night it is, if people are waiting to see him, he will go out of the gate to receive them and escort them inside. He belongs to Jodhpur, the land of the Thar desert where men are men. But he loves cooking and is a dab hand in the kitchen where he can create masterpieces — Chinese food, continental... "*kuchh*

bhi banwa lo (order anything and I'll make it)," he says. "When I'm around, my friends never have to worry about food," he grins. I believe him. He's also a keen sportsman, a national level basketball player.

He also has a wide and deep understanding of IT applications. He whips out his phone and, ignoring the somewhat hunted look in my eyes, proceeds to take me through the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) dashboard that can offer you a tour of the JJM's work down to the block level. This is technology application at its best, and it does not differentiate on the basis of caste, religion or community. "If somebody in the village complains, 'You haven't done anything for us', all I have to do is take him through the app."

Breakfast arrives. It is vegetarian, healthy but delicious. Thin roundels of bread toasted crisp, smeared with spicy potato filling; crunchy on the outside, buttery on the inside. Hot *rawa idlis* with *sambar* and chutney. *Poha*. Fresh fruit. A Jodhpur speciality, called *Misri ki roti* or *binapaani ki roti* — basically a baked sweet biscuit. And sweet *masala chai*, robust and full-bodied. He helps himself to something that looks like *bikaneri bhujia*. You can take a boy out of Rajasthan but you can't take Rajasthan out

of a boy, I think to myself.

He tells me about his constituency. It is on the India-Pakistan border and before it was fenced, families would often visit relatives in villages that lie on the other side without being aware they were crossing the border. That was the situation till the 1970s. But smuggling

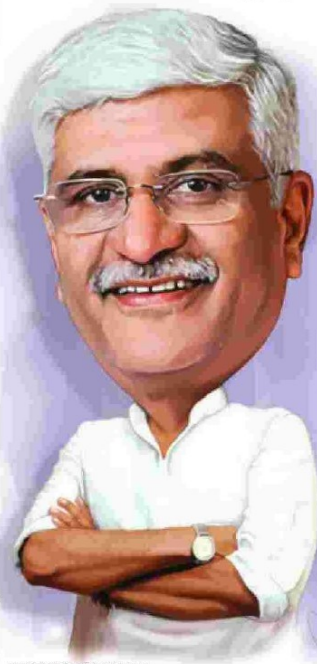


ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

from Pakistan started in the 1980s, gold and silver first and then acetic anhydride, a crucial chemical in the making of heroin. As Pakistan experimented with fundamentalism under Gen Zia-ul-Haq, conversion activity could be seen in border villages as well. "It was immediately visible in the clothes people wore: the *dhoti* and the *pagdi* was replaced by the *dadhi* (beard) and the skullcap," he says.

Shekhawat became active in student politics in the 1990s. He motivated young men and women from local villages to form border security squads. Highly experienced desert trackers, basically cattle herders in an area where it would rain once in three years, called "*paagi*" who could track pug marks, were encouraged to share their trade with these squads. This, in turn, became an unofficial, informal league of counter-terrorism experts who shared information with the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Military Intelligence. "Young men and women were given a stipend, both to study and to become informal border volunteers. Then the fence came up and now, you have the challenge of drones," he says.

I steer him back to his ministry — which is vast. The water resources ministry has been expanded to include some elements of sanitation, clean Ganga mission, urban water, rural water, river interlinking... More recently, he has got an additional responsibility — Green Hydrogen, which is going to be India's ultimate weapon to brandish at those (including a former US President) who rail that India is among the "dirtiest, most polluting" nations in the world.

Shekhawat's mantra, which he repeats during the course of the conversation, is

"ownership". People must have ownership of resources. Whether it is the target of providing every home with piped water by 2024 or ensuring the quality of drinking water, the model is — the people must get involved. And this should be via monetary contribution as well as management of the resource. So, while state governments have been provided financial outlays to create drinking water infrastructure, the gram sabha and panchayat contributed 10 per cent towards the cost of infrastructure, with Scheduled Caste villages contributing 5 per cent. The infrastructure is maintained at nominal cost, which is recovered from the users.

Gujarat, he says, has already done this and Himachal Pradesh and Haryana are in the process. Paying imposes a sense of responsibility. He reacts with vehemence to the election promise of the Aam Aadmi Party in Goa, for instance, that drinking water will be free if AAP comes to power.

Shekhawat concedes that river interlinking is not without peril. But he also flags the problem of floods and drought, and says some solution must be found. The linking of the Ken and Betwa between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh has been endorsed by both states. This is going to be the test case — not just of the technical aspect but also the politics of river interlinking.

"*Nalsejal*" (a tap in every household) is all very well, I task him somewhat belligerently, "but the water also has to be fit to drink." Every urban household will install a reverse osmosis plant even if they can't afford anything else, I inform him. He is patient. "Did you test the water in your taps before you decided to get an

"Did you test the water in your taps before you decided to get an RO?" he asks. He says testing water quality is his primary mission

RO?" he asks. He says testing water quality is his primary mission. Initially in every Indian district, but gradually at every block level, groups of women are being trained to test water quality. It is a simple, uncomplicated kit that gives you a breakdown of water quality almost immediately — in itself the result of a challenge put to hundreds of start-ups that have produced several innovative kits, all linked to an IT grid that can be monitored online. Impurities like arsenic, mercury and lead can be detected instantly and can be treated, he says. I try to imagine what will happen to the bottled water industry when that happens.

Shekhawat's passion for his work is evident and it is clear he can talk on the subject for hours. But I have another question: politics and the issue of leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Rajasthan, the tussle between him and former chief minister Vasundhara Raje Scindia. He is, again, unconventionally candid. He doesn't deny rivalry — "politics is about competition". But reports of differences are also exaggerated. His primary target, understandably, is the failure of the Congress-led state government, currently in power.

There's a pause. Someone has come to see him. He is also a bit pensive. His mother, in her late 70s, has survived Covid but has a chronic lung condition that prevents her from breathing normally. There isn't a lot modern medicine can do. We part, however, on a note of hope. Water is going to be a central part of the government's 2024 election campaign. And Gajendra Singh Shekhawat's work will be crucial for it.

Rashtriya Sahara- 25- September-2021

टिहरी बांध ने पहली बार रचा इतिहास

ऋषिकेश (एसएनबी)। टिहरी बांध परियोजना के इतिहास में 24 सितंबर का दिन उल्लेखनीय साबित हुआ। बांध ने टिहरी जलाशय में जल स्तर पहली बार 830 मीटर के पूर्ण जलाशय स्तर को छुआ।

गौरतलब है कि टिहरी बांध परियोजना पिछले 15 वर्षों से लगातार 1000 मेगावाट की पीकिंग पावर के साथ-साथ पेयजल और सिंचाई के लिए जल, बाढ़ नियंत्रण, मछली पालन, पर्यटन इत्यादि जैसे अन्य लाभ प्रदान कर रही है, लेकिन फिर भी इसकी पूर्ण क्षमता का उपयोग नहीं किया जा सका। टिहरी जलाशय का स्तर पूर्ण जलाशय स्तर (एफआरएल), ईएल 830 मीटर तक नहीं भरा गया।

टीएचडीसी इंडिया लिमिटेड के द्वारा परियोजना के लंबित पुनर्वास मुद्दों को उदार दृष्टिकोण से हल करने के बाद विद्युत मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार और उत्तराखंड सरकार के सक्रिय सहयोग से इस विशालकाय लक्ष्य को प्राप्त किया जा सका। इसके बाद उत्तराखंड के मुख्यमंत्री पुष्कर सिंह धामी ने जनता के व्यापक हितों को दृष्टिगत रखते हुए 25 अगस्त को टिहरी जलाशय के स्तर को ईएल 830 मीटर तक भरने की अनुमति प्रदान की।

Rashtriya Sahara- 25- September-2021

नोएडा गोल्फ कोर्स पर जुमनि के खिलाफ याचिका पर नोटिस

नई दिल्ली (एसएनबी)। सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने अनधिकृत रूप से भूजल का दोहन करने के मामले में नोएडा गोल्फ कोर्स सोसायटी पर 25 लाख रुपए का जुर्माना लगाने के राष्ट्रीय हरित अधिकरण (एनजीटी) के आदेश के खिलाफ दायर अपील पर केंद्र और अन्य पक्षों को नोटिस जारी किए।

■ भूजल दोहन पर एनजीटी ने लगाया है 25 लाख का जुर्माना

बताया कि सोसाइटी नोएडा प्राधिकरण द्वारा जलमल शोधन संयंत्र से उपलब्ध कराए जा रहे पानी का इस्तेमाल कर रही है। अनधिकृत रूप से भूजल का दोहन किए जाने के मामले में एनजीटी ने नोएडा गोल्फ कोर्स और एडवेंट नैविस बिजनेस पार्क पर 25 लाख रुपए

जस्टिस एस अब्दुल नजीर और कृष्ण मुरारी की बेंच ने पर्यावरण एवं वन मंत्रालय, उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार, केंद्रीय भूमि जल प्राधिकरण, नवीन ओखला औद्योगिक विकास प्राधिकरण (नोएडा) और अन्य को नोटिस जारी कर जवाब मांगा। सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने अपील को अपने समक्ष लंबित इसी तरह के मामले के साथ सूचीबद्ध कर दिया। अदालत ने कहा कि भूजल का अत्यधिक दोहन नहीं करें। क्या आप अब भी भूजल निकाल रहे हैं।

नोएडा गोल्फ कोर्स सोसायटी की ओर से पेश हुए वकील ने अदालत को

का जुर्माना लगाया था।

हरित इकाई ने यह आदेश केंद्रीय प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड और उत्तर प्रदेश प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड की एक समिति की रिपोर्ट के बाद दिया था जिसमें कहा गया था कि भूजल का अवैध दोहन किया जा रहा है और बागवानी के लिए इस भूजल का दुरुपयोग किया जा रहा है। एनजीटी ने कहा था कि यह स्पष्ट नहीं है कि अनापत्ति प्रमाण पत्र की शर्तों का पालन किया जा रहा है या नहीं पर्यावरण कार्यकर्ता विक्रांत तोंगड ने याचिका दायर कर यह मुद्दा उठाया था।