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Water taxi to Taj via Agra canal?

PILOT PROJECT Steamer service to Agra may be explored if Yamuna water taxi project is successful but water shortage is a big hurdle

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NEW DELHI: Successful implementation of the water taxi project on Yamuna in Delhi will pave way for the revival of navigation in the 143-year-old Agra Canal stretching from Okhla to Agra.

Two years ago, road transport and highway minister Nitin Gadkari ordered a study to check feasibility of waterway between the two cities. An IWA official said that an assessment is being done and the project may take time to materialise.

"The water taxi project is being seen as a pilot project. Based on the response, further course of action will be decided. The problem with steamer service between Delhi and Agra is non-availability of adequate water in the canal. It is also being assessed whether this plan will be viable in terms of investment and travellers will give preference to waterway route, while the Yamuna expressway is more convenient and time saving," said an official from Inland Waterways Authority of India.

A Netherlands-based agency was roped in to work out a technical report on developing infrastructure on Yamuna to facilitate goods and passenger traffic. "At present, initiation of cargo service on this route does not

seem practical," he said.

However, low water level in Yamuna poses a bigger challenge for the government. There are stretches from Delhi to Agra that remain dry during the summer. The study was also ordered to find out solution for retaining water on those stretches round the year.

Meanwhile, water conservationist Rajendra Singh lauded the proposal but said that authorities must find out a solution to maintain water level required for ferrying steamers.

"Principally, there is no harm if the rivers are used for transportation. But, they should ensure adequate flow of the river. However, it seems their plan is not to restore the river but to get monetary advantages out of it. They will prevent water by constructing more barrages," Singh said.

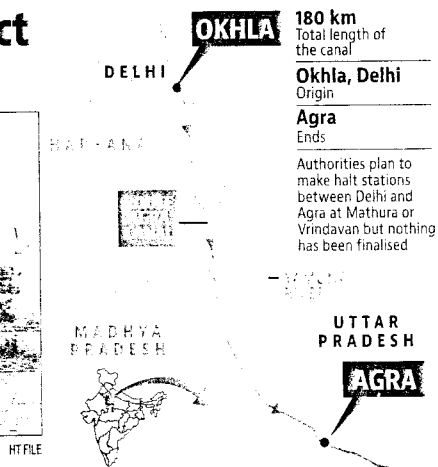
Environmentalist Manoj Misra said that Delhi government is trying to replicate the British model, which has been a failure in India. "The British planned the Agra Canal primarily for irrigation based on a concept from the West, where availability of water in the river was not an issue, but realised our folly soon after. Surprisingly our government wants to revisit their folly. The fact is that the river has no water," Misra said.

Agra Canal water taxi project

The pilot project will make way for the revival of navigation in the 143-year-old Agra Canal stretching from Okhla to Agra



Low water level in Yamuna during summers poses a big challenge for the govt.



Debris to be used for constructing roads

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NEW DELHI: In an environmentally conscious approach, the Centre is planning to use debris and sediments gathered from dredging river Yamuna for the construction of roads in Delhi and NCR.

A feasibility report is to be conducted in this regard, after which an arrangement will be made with National Highway Authority of India and the Public Works Department, said a ministry for road transport, highways and shipping official.

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) will be allowed to dredge the Delhi part of Yamuna to run a ferry service. Disposing of the excavated material has been a major cause of concern for authorities, and

hence, they planned to explore avenues to make best use of it.

"Dredging of Yamuna is mandatory because a certain depth is required for smooth navigation of the ferry. However, disposing of sediments and debris from the river is an issue that needs to be addressed. A suggestion is that it may be used for construction of roads. After a proper research, the material will be used for road construction in Delhi and NCR," said the official, adding that testing will be done to ascertain whether this will have any impact on environment.

Experts say that apart from road construction or riprap, the dredged material can be used for manufacturing of bricks, ceramics, and concrete.

"It may be useful for restoration or nourishment of aquatic

SEDIMENTS

Solid materials consisting of rocks, minerals and remains of plants or animals. These break down naturally due to weathering and erosion. They often move from one place to another

Dredging

Dredging is an excavation by different techniques to clear the river corridor to be used for navigation

the move seemed to benefit sand miners. "We fought for years so that river sand extraction could be banned. Now, they have reinvented the term for sand mining, and call it 'dredging'. There is huge difference between 'removing silt' and 'dredging'. The move aims to favour contractors," said Rajendra Singh, water conservationist and a Magsaysay awardee.

Another environmentalist, Manoj Misra, said that dredging disturbs the aquatic system of the river and is a threat to its embankment. "It will disturb the ecosystem along river Yamuna. It should not be done. Instead, the authorities should work to ensure adequate water availability in the river," said Misra, who is also the convener of Yamuna Jive Abhiyaan.

CANAL DATES TO BRITISH ERA

- The British administration planned Agra Canal for irrigation, following a series of famines in Delhi and UP regions in the 19th century
- The canal starts from Okhla Head, passes through Faridabad and Mathura, and carries water to Agra and a small portion of Bharatpur

- An excavation started in 1868 and the canal was officially opened in 1874 by Sir William Muir
- Initially, the channel was available for traffic, but was closed in 1904 in the absence of adequate number of users and the cost of working expenses were higher than the receipts

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Narmada panel: The Supreme Court has said that it would set up a committee of experts to look into the compensation and rehabilitation aspects of oustees of the Sardar Sarovar Project on the Narmada river. P7

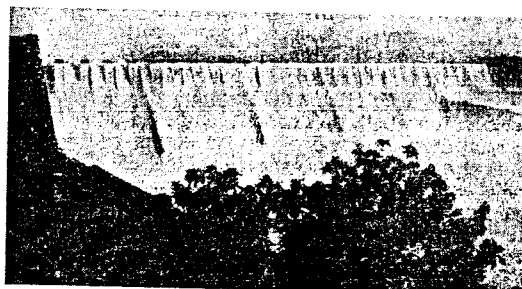
Panel to rehabilitate Narmada dam oustees

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 31 January

The Supreme Court today said that it would set up a committee of experts to look into the compensation and rehabilitation aspects of oustees of the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) on Narmada river and made it clear that it would not allow "stalling" of the project.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice J S Khehar said to ensure "better deal" for the project-affected families, it is willing to "twist" the arms of the executive and asked the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and states ~ Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra ~ to suggest names of experts who could be appointed in the committee which would deal with the resettlement and rehabilitation of oustees.

"We will constitute a committee with your (NBA)



participation and that the committee will determine the quantum and nature of compensation.

"The decision will be acceptable to all," the Bench, also comprising Justices N V Ramana and D Y Chandrachud, said.

The bench further said it will ask the state governments to deposit the money in the apex court registry after the committee decides the issue. The court made it clear to the parties, includ-

ing activist Medha Patkar-led NBA, that it would not allow stalling of the project.

"Since 2002 this writ petition is pending. Fifteen years have passed. We cannot allow this to remain pending. We cannot allow this country to be held back," it said.

The Bench asked Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi, Additional Solicitor Generals (ASGs) P S Patwalia and Tushar Mehta, appearing for the states concerned,

and the counsel for NBA to suggest names of experts, who could be appointed in the committee, on 8 February, the next date of hearing.

At the outset, ASG Patwalia, appearing for Madhya Pradesh, said there were 4,998 project-affected families in the state and their land measuring around 7,000 acres was acquired for the project.

Some affected families opted for special rehabilitation package and some went for "land for land" scheme in which affected persons got land in lieu of acquired plots, he said.

Advocate Sanjay Parikh, appearing for NBA, said 192 villages and one township would be affected in Madhya Pradesh alone and about 45,000 affected people are yet to be rehabilitated.

There should not be "submergence (of villages) without rehabilitation", he said.

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River of discord ST- 1.2

The waters of the Mahanadi have become choppy still with the BJD government in Odisha rejecting the formula proposed by the Centre to settle the raging dispute over the river with the Bharatiya Janata Party's government in Chhattisgarh. Specifically, the Naveen Patnaik administration has rejected the constitution of the negotiation committee by the Union water resources ministry. The stalemate will persist for some time yet.

A river belongs to Nature, and ideally must lend no scope for another puerile bout of Centre-State kerfuffle. Yet at the core of the Mahanadi dispute is the construction of projects upstream of the river by Chhattisgarh, thus affecting the flow in neighbouring Odisha and at the grave cost of agriculture in a predominantly rural state. The water of the Mahanadi is vital for the farmlands in Odisha, as often as not confronted by drought. Mr Patnaik's letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi makes it explicit that the negotiation committee will only delay acceptance ~ if at all ~ of Odisha's demand for a tribunal to take a call on what it deems to be irregular constructions. The "negotiation committee" would seem to be a BJP embroidery woven by its government at the Centre to safeguard the interests of the party's government in the state. On closer reflection, there is no scope for such a panel under the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, which does provide for a tribunal.

Rather than impose the decision on the administration in Bhubaneswar as a fait accompli, its formation ought to have been based on a triangular consensus ~ of the Centre, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh. The Odisha chief minister's refusal to abide by the Centre's formula is, therefore, rooted in a legislative enactment. He is on firm ground too as the Centre has failed to direct the government in Raipur to stop the "unilateral construction of barrages and dams upstream of the Mahanadi".

The fine print of the controversy must be that Odisha has been accorded the short shrift. Regrettably, the flow of a river has acquired a political dimension with the Centre overly anxious to defer to the interests of Chhattisgarh. The river and the constructions thereon are now at the centre of the discord between the BJP and the BJD. The past three months have witnessed more and more of unilateral and arbitrary action instead of meaningful negotiations. The putative "negotiation committee" is tilted against Odisha. It will be headed by a member of the Central Water Commission, five members representing Central agencies, and members from Jharkhand, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. Odisha's chief engineer is said to have been nominated without taking the state into confidence. It is the Centre's game, set to match the agenda of Chhattisgarh.