

# SYL Canal: Mired in political opportunism

SUCHA SINGH GILL

Leaders of Punjab and Haryana have conveniently changed their stand and stance on the issue of water sharing and the SYL Canal, in the course of the last 40 years. This needs the attention of people of Punjab & Haryana and enlightened citizens.

**T**HE issue of water sharing between Punjab and Haryana is on the agenda of all political parties in the wake of the Supreme Court hearing on Presidential reference on this issue. The issue before the Supreme Court has been the validity of Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004. Politicians from all the major parties in Punjab — the SAD-BJP combine, the Indian National Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party — have declared that they will not allow any drop of water to flow to Haryana. The Punjab Assembly passed a bill on March 14, 2016, to denotify the land acquired from the farmers so that the SYL Canal can be filled with earth to block any flow of water through it. This can be understood in view of the coming Assembly elections early next year in Punjab.

This issue has also united all political parties of Haryana — the BJP, the INLD and the Haryana unit of the Indian National Congress — to get water to flow through the SYL canal. The Supreme Court stayed the process of filling the canal in Punjab by appointing the Home Secretary, Government of India, Chief Secretary and the DGP, Punjab, as receivers to control the filling of the canal. This exposed the opportunism of leaders from various parties on this issue.

Records show that two notifications were issued by the government of Punjab on February 20, 1978, for the acquisition of land for construction of the Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal. In the wake of a letter written by the Punjab government on July 4, 1978, demanding Rs 3 crore for its construction, the Haryana government issued a cheque of Rs 1 crore, which was

accepted by the Punjab government on March 31, 1979. The Akali Dal-Janata government then had the same person as the chief minister as now. The same chief minister got the Punjab Assembly to pass the Bill to denotify the land under SYL Canal. The construction of SYL Canal was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi at village Kapoori, in Patiala District on April 11, 1982. The present PPCC Chief was the MP from Patiala and was present on the occasion. He was responsible for getting Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004, passed later on. The major part of the canal was completed after the Rajiv-Longowal Accord, which stated in clause 9 that: "Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan will continue to get water not less than what they are using from the Ravi-Beas system on 01.07.1985" (9.1). The claims of Punjab and Haryana for the remaining waters were to be referred to a tribunal presided over by a Supreme Court judge and decisions of the tribunal were to be binding on both the parties. It was further stated in clause 9.3 that: "The construction of the SYL Canal shall continue. The canal shall be completed by August 15, 1986". When the major construction of the canal was undertaken, the present PPCC Chief and the Aam Aadmi Party convener were ministers in the Punjab cabinet of the Akali Dal.

This brings out the opportunism of all the major political parties and their leaders. They have been changing their position on this issue and rousing the passions of masses to gain political power especially now, at the juncture when the Punjab Assembly elections are due in February next year. The opportunism of a political leadership in both Punjab and Haryana too has been exposed. The



Farmers filling the SYL Canal with the help of tracked excavators in Saini Majra village in Ropar district. २१

water that flows to their respective territories through canals is used in an inefficient way. In both the states, canals which carry water from the rivers and their distributaries are not properly maintained. They are not regularly cleaned and their banks are not repaired, causing occasional breaches in them and damaging crops by flooding the fields. There is a lot of wastage of water. The tail-end farmers do not get adequate water. Consequently, water-use efficiency is very low. The Planning Commission reports based on field studies bring out low water-use efficiency of major and medium irrigation projects (2012).

Politicians ruling Punjab and Haryana do not lose any opportunity to pit farmers from Punjab and Haryana against each other but have never thought seriously of improving water-use efficiency. By improving water-use efficiency by 15 to 20 per cent from the present level can compensate each state to the amount they are fighting for a share in the Ravi-Beas waters. Experts in the region, espe-

cially from Punjab, have been warning the government about depleting ground water resources since 1986. Several reports have been submitted to the state government, research papers have appeared in research journals and articles in the newspapers — all urging the government to take corrective steps. Suggestions have been made to move away from the water-intensive cropping pattern which is not sustainable. The governments in the region have been completely neglecting these warnings and the entire region of the North-western plains of Punjab, Haryana and western UP has become water stressed. It has been rightly pointed out by Capt. Amarinder Singh that at present, Punjab's annual agricultural requirement of water is 52.5 MAF against the total dependable availability of 26.9 MAF from the Sutlej, Beas and Ravi rivers. But even if no water, hypothetically speaking, is given to any other state, Punjab will remain water stressed as long as we continue with the existing cropping pattern and irrigation technology. The issues are how we use the available water and how quickly we adopt a sustainable cropping pattern. For not doing so the blame has to be shared by all those who have been at the helm of affairs in Punjab and Haryana.

The issue of river water sharing in a situation of scarcity cannot be settled on the basis of the water requirement of different states but on the formula of sharing assets and liabilities in the Punjab Reorganisation Act of 1966, in a 60:40 ratio between Punjab and Haryana covering Sutlej, Ravi, Beas and Yamuna (which was available to Punjab before creation of Haryana) rivers, as suggested by Amarinder Singh. This appears a just and equitable way in the present situa-

tion but has been avoided in all notifications since 1976 on this issue and by various tribunals set up for this purpose.

The Government of India announced a National Water Policy in 2013, urging states to take appropriate measures on water issues. It was suggested that in each state a Water Regulatory Authority needs to be set up to regulate the use of ground water resources. This has been completely ignored by the states. It was decided by the Punjab government not to accept this policy. Saving water or putting the existing water to efficient use is not on the agenda of the governments and political parties in the region.

The only agenda the politicians in power, or aspiring to be in power, have is to rouse the emotions of the farming community so that they rally behind them to fight against the neighbouring states. They are trying to divide farming communities when they need to be united at the national level to mitigate the farming crisis and resolve the conditions leading to farmers' suicides. The leaders who have presided over the depletion of the region's aquifers are claiming to be ready to make any sacrifice for saving the Ravi-Beas waters.

The silence of the Central government on this issue not only appears intriguing but displays an unwillingness to resolve the issue, allowing the situation to drift and leading to chaos. Punjab and Haryana are simmering with discontent. Political parties share power at the state and Centre but are not prepared to forge a common vision to solve decades-old issues and share river waters in an equitable and just way.

*The writer is on the Faculty of CRRID, Chandigarh.*

# Strong winds, rain lash region

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

SHIMLA, APRIL 4

Scattered rain accompanied by strong winds lashed several parts of the state today, plummeting the mercury. The sky remained overcast during the day in Shimla and other places. High-velocity winds accompanied by intermittent rain were witnessed at isolated places in the lower, mid and higher hills.

The change in weather has left farmers and fruit growers worried as stormy conditions are considered harmful for the standing wheat crop in the lower areas and stone fruit/vegetable crops in the mid/higher hills. "The wheat crop is ready for harvesting while the stone fruit crops are at the setting stage. The weather at this stage can be harmful," said farm experts.

Tissa and Bharmour in the tribal areas of Chamba district received 27 mm and 21 mm of rain in the past 24



Tourists walk in the rain at Shimla on Monday. PHOTO: AMIT KANWAR

hours while Kukumseri and Seobagh recorded 13 mm and 12 mm rain, Saloni 7 mm, Manali 5.2 mm and Bhuntar 4 mm.

The maximum temperature stayed at 38.2 degree C in Una while Nahan and Sundernagar recorded 32.6 degree C and 31.7 degree C followed by Bhuntar 25.0 degree C, Shimla 21.9 degree C, Manali 16.6 degree C and Kalpa 13.4 degree C.

The minimum temperature dropped by one or two

degrees. Keylong in Lahaul-Spiti district recorded zero degree C, Manali 5.4 degree C, Kalpa 8.6 degree C, Bhuntar 14.6 degree C, Shimla 14.8 degree C, Solan 16.0 degree C, Palampur and Sundernagar 17.4 degree C, Una 20.7 degree C and Nahan 21.9 degree C.

The Met Department has predicted dry weather in the region tomorrow, rains/thunderstorm at isolated places on April 6 and dry weather till April 10.

## Farmers worried

- The sky remained overcast during the day in Shimla and other places
- The change in weather has left farmers and fruit growers worried as stormy conditions are considered harmful for the standing wheat crop in the lower areas and stone fruit/vegetable crops in the mid/higher hills

## CORRIGENDUM

The Times of India

Title : FLASH FLOODS IN PAKISTAN KILL 55

Author :

Location :

Article Date : 04/05/2016



Reuters

**WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE:** A bridge is covered with floodwater on the outskirts of Peshawar on Monday. Flash floods triggered by heavy rain in Pakistan have killed at least 55 people and rescuers are trying to help thousands of survivors, including some cut off by a landslide in a mountain valley, officials said. A disaster management official in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province said nearly 150 homes had been destroyed and tents and blankets were being distributed to the homeless





■ The pontoon bridges built for the World Culture Festival held in March being dismantled.

MOHD ZAKIR/HT PHOTO

# Yamuna fest: NGT panel yet to visit site to assess damage

**STUCK** Committee says Art of Living must first vacate the Yamuna floodplain

## HT Correspondent

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**NEW DELHI:** The damage, if any, the Yamuna floodplain suffered because of the Art of Living Foundation's culture festival is unlikely to be ascertained any time soon.

The National Green Tribunal-constituted principal committee, which was to submit its report by April 7, is yet to visit the site. It may seek more time to submit their report.

The committee on Monday wrote to the tribunal chairperson asking if the foundation would vacate the site.

Representatives of the foundation said they were in the process of vacating the site and will do it as soon as work on removing the stage – which was spread over 7 acres – is complete.

It is on the basis of the report of this committee that the tribunal will ascertain how much damage, if any, was caused to the floodplain. It is also supposed to tell the tribunal what the road map for the restoration is and how much money will be required. This money is supposed to be paid by the foundation, according to NGT's March 9 order.

The foundation told HT last week that it needed time till the second week of April to dismantle the stage and vacate the site.

"Our role is to return the site

the way it was. We have taken on board some environment experts. One of them is Dr Rakesh Ranjan, an environmental consultant. If there is anything specific we need to do, we will. However, we won't allow any sort of damage to the environment," Art of Living foundation trustee Rashmi Palliwal had told HT.

On April 1, the NGT had filed an application requesting the tribunal to accept a bank guarantee instead of the ₹4.75 crore that it was supposed to furnish, as ordered. The foundation was

asked to pay ₹5 crore.

They submitted ₹25 lakh on the day of the festival and furnished an undertaking that the remainder will be submitted by April 1.

The application said the NGT is in the process of finalising a proposal to conduct a study to assess the damage to the floodplain.

The tribunal asked the petitioners in the case to reply to the request and the proposal.

The counsel for the petitioners, Sanjay Parikh, said they were opposed to the idea and submitted photos to show that damage to the floodplain was apparent.

"The respondents (foundation) had given an undertaking before the tribunal that they would pay the amount in three weeks and now they are coming for extension of time. This is subversion of rule of law and the tribunal's orders," Parikh said.

►...We have taken on board some environment experts. One of them is Dr Rakesh Ranjan, who is an environmental consultant. If there is anything specific we need to do, we will.

RASHMI PALLIWAL, Art of Living Foundation trustee





## 55 DEAD IN PAK FLASH FLOODS

■ The weather system that brought the unusually heavy rain was expected to move northeast, towards northern India, although more isolated storms were expected in northern Pakistan, the Meteorological Dept said.

■ Flash floods triggered by heavy rain in Pakistan have killed at least 55 people and rescuers were trying on Monday to help thousands of survivors including some cut off by a landslide in a mountain valley, officials said. *Reuters*

# सिंचाई परियोजनाओं को तेजी से पूरा करें : जेटली

41-5-4

## भारत जल सप्ताह

नई दिल्ली | विशेष संवाददाता

केंद्रीय वित्त मंत्री अरुण जेटली ने तत्काल नतीजों के लिए सिंचाई परियोजनाओं को तेजी से पूरा करने की जोरदार वकालत की है। वित्त मंत्री ने कहा कि अगले कुछ सालों में किसानों की आमदनी को दो गुना करने व ग्रामीण भारत की अर्थव्यवस्था की मजबूती के लिए ऐसा करना बेहद जरूरी है।

जेटली ने इस बारे में केंद्र से भरपूर मदद देने का भरोसा देते हुए साफ किया कि अनियमित मौसम सहित अन्य वजहों के कारण आने वाली चुनौतियों से राज्य सरकारें अकेले मुकाबला नहीं कर सकती हैं। जल संसाधन मंत्री उमा भारती ने कहा कि जलवायु परिवर्तनों से जल संसाधनों पर विपरीत असर पड़ा है और सरकार के साथ समाज को भी जल संरक्षण के प्रयासों में जुटना होगा।

भारत जल सप्ताह - 2016 के उद्घाटन सत्र को संबोधित करते हुए जेटली ने कहा कि पिछले दो साल मानसून के कमजोर रहने के कारण काफी

## सिंचाई का आधारभूत ढांचा तैयार करने में जुटा केंद्र

जेटली ने कहा कि केंद्र सिंचाई का आधारभूत ढांचा तैयार करने में पूरी ताकत से जुटा है। नाबाड़ो को बड़ी परियोजनाओं के लिए पर्याप्त कोष बनाने को कहा गया है और



प्रधानमंत्री कृषि सिंचाई योजना के तहत अधूरे कार्यों को 2017 तक जल्दी पूरा करने के लिए प्रयास किए जा रहे हैं।

चुनौतीपूर्ण रहे। इस कारण अर्थव्यवस्था में मामूली वृद्धि हुई। इसका असर सेवा और विनिर्माण क्षेत्र पर पड़ा, क्योंकि इसने भारत की 55 प्रतिशत आबादी की खरीद शक्ति को प्रभावित किया है। कार्यक्रम में कृषि मंत्री राधामोहन सिंह ने कहा देश में पानी की कमी को पूरा करने के लिए इस साल पांच लाख नए तालाब व कुएं खोदे जाएंगे।

# पाकिस्तान में मूसलाधार बारिश, 60 की मौत

इस्लामाबाद/श्रीनगर. पाक अधिकृत कश्मीर के गिलगिट-बाल्टिस्तान सहित कुछ पाकिस्तान इलाकों में बारिश से संबंधित घटनाओं और भूस्खलनों में कम से कम 60 लोगों की मौत हो गई है। पख्तूनख्वा और गिलगिट-बाल्टिस्तान में मूसलाधार बारिश के कारण गाजी गढ़ी में कई गांव पानी में डूब गए हैं। कई जगह छत और घर ढहने के भीषण हादसे हुए हैं।



चिलास में कम से कम नौ लोगों की मौत हो गई है। छत ढही, एक ही परिवार के पांच मरे : तंजीर में छत ढहने से परिवार के पांच सदस्यों की मौत हुई। मुजफ्फराबाद में भूस्खलन से

परिवार के 8 लोगों की मौत हो गई। स्वात घाटी भूस्खलन के कारण कोराकरम राजमार्ग विभिन्न स्थानों पर जाम हो गया। इसके चलते कई यात्री विभिन्न स्थानों पर फंस गए।