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# Farakka Barrage not to blame for Bihar floods: Uma

Nitish Kumar's fears on siltation along Ganga unfounded, says Minister

JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI

Union Water Resources Minister Uma Bharti has stated that the Farakka Barrage – said to be responsible for aggravating floods in Bihar during the monsoon – is blameless. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, on the other hand, has said the barrage ought to be decommissioned because it has led to silt building up along the Ganga.

Ms. Bharti has said developing the waterway between Haldia and Allahabad will “take care of the silt”. “Farakka Barrage is not the problem ... I have had experts look at it,” she told *The Hindu* in an interview.

## ‘Creative use’

“Nitish Kumar is an engineer and he knows it, too. Once the waterway on the Ganga begins, developers will dredge the silt and (Transport Minister) Nitin Gadkari will find creative ways to use that, too.” The waterway Ms Bharti was referring to is one



**Snowballing issue:** The Farakka Barrage on the Ganga in West Bengal. ■ PROJECT WEBSITE

of six waterways proposed by Mr. Gadkari as part of a massive plan to improve inland water transportation in the country.

The longest of them, National Waterway 1 (NW1) will be on the Ganga from Haldia in West Bengal to Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh, stretching 1,620 kilometres. The NW1 will span Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. A detailed project report has already been prepared for the ₹42 billion

crore NW1 project to be funded by the World Bank.

However, the project also involves constructing barrages, and concerns have been raised that this will increase siltation, a perennial problem on this stretch.

Last year, monsoon rains led to severe floods in Bihar and Mr. Kumar – who petitioned Prime Minister Modi – said decommissioning the 40-year-old, 2.6 km-long Farakka Barrage was the only way out. This is because

the structure, originally conceived to keep the Kolkata port navigable, had only worsened the flood situation in Bihar over the years.

Mr. Kumar has raised this issue during meetings of the National Ganga Basin Authority, said Ms. Bharti, and she had a committee, led by retired engineer Madhav Chitale, investigate the problems of siltation in the Ganga. “The only solution to this is navigation,” she added.

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# Ganga pollution: Experts to take call on who should be held guilty

Proposed law on Ganga will not be enacted 'in a hurry', draft not complete: Uma Bharati

AMITABH SINHA  
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

PROGRESS ON drafting a new law to protect the Ganga from pollution has run into a hurdle due to lack of consensus over what could be considered an offence and who should be held guilty of polluting the river.

Water Resources Minister Uma Bharati told *The Indian Express* that the proposed Ganga law would not be enacted "in a hurry" because that can put a large number of people in trouble.

"Everyone agrees that a law on Ganga is needed. But the draft as we have now is not complete... the question is who should be held guilty (of polluting the river)? About 20 lakh people bathe in the Ganga every day.

Now, it shouldn't be the case that anyone is picked up by police for leaving flowers or leaves in the river. So who should be held responsible? Who has to ensure that pollutants are not left in the river? These things have to be made very clear," Bharati said.

Last month, a five-member committee headed by Justice (retd) Girdhar Malviya, constituted to frame a draft law on the Ganga, submitted its report to the Water Resources Ministry. The report has not been made public. Bharati said more consultations were being carried out. "We have referred the draft to experts. It is possible that more aspects will be added to the draft. The exercise is still incomplete," she said.

"Work on the legislation has been going on for more than



Uma Bharati

three years. It began during the Manmohan Singh government, which had constituted an inter-ministerial committee in February 2014 for this purpose. Former Chief Vigilance Commissioner N Vittal, a member of the National Ganga River Basin Authority, was also asked to prepare a draft law. Another draft

was being prepared by Ganga Mahasabha, a "pan-India organisation dedicated to nature and culture".

The law seeks to make it illegal to pollute the Ganga. It would also make it a duty of the state governments to ensure that adequate flows are maintained in the river throughout its length.

The minister said that the proposed structural changes in the water management institutions will go ahead as planned. A committee had last year suggested that the Central Water Commission and Central Ground Water Board, two of the biggest water management institutions, be disbanded and replaced with a new multi-disciplinary National Water Commission. The committee had emphasised the need to move away from en-

gineering solutions of water management towards a multi-disciplinary approach. The proposal met stiff resistance from the Central Water Commission.

"Of course, the (proposed) changes will be implemented. I fully support the recommendations of the committee. They (those opposing the move) will have to accept the changes... They have some anxieties... We are trying to sort these things out. But it would be wrong to say that the changes would make engineers redundant. Engineering expertise will continue to play an important role in water management. But there is a role for other disciplines as well. The changes will ensure that expertise from other fields is taken into account while managing water resources," Bharati said.

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# Tribunal to start hearing arguments on 1,004 tmc ft

DC CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD, MAY 4

The Justice Brijesh Kumar Tribunal has decided to start hearing the arguments between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states over allotment of Krishna waters from the 1,004 tmc ft quota earmarked for undivided AP from July 6.

As per the directions of Tribunal, both states have submitted their replies on Thursday to the Statements of the Case (the reply by AP to the statement of TS and vice versa) filed earlier.

The Tribunal gave time till May 15 to both the states to file rejoinders to the replies.

The Tribunal also stipulated May 30 as the date for filing of the Draft Statement by both the governments on what the actual relief, like project specific allotments, they want from the Tribunal.

Based on these averments, the Tribunal will hear the arguments and give its verdict.

On Thursday senior counsels C.S. Vaidyanathan from TS and A.K. Ganguly from AP were present before the Tribunal.

Both the states stuck to their points of view either in statement and replies.

The TS government said the state has got great injus-

tice in allotment of Krishna waters to the projects in the region, and in undivided AP, arguments before various tribunals reflected only the needs of Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions and not Telangana projects and allocations.

The AP government, refuting this allegation, said that undivided AP consisted of all regions, including Telangana.

It said that the decisions and allotments taken at that time were collective decision by the then government in the interests of all the regions of the state and as such, it cannot be accused of any injustice.

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## Cauvery: all-party meeting on May 9

**BENGALURU, DHNS:** Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has convened an all-party meeting on May 9 in Bengaluru to discuss the Centre's proposal to set up an expert group to look into grievances of riparian states of the Cauvery river.

Sources in the Chief Minister's office said the state government is also planning to pass a resolution in the legislature on the Mokedatu project, which has met with stiff opposition from the Tamil Nadu government. The project envisages

constructing a reservoir across the river Cauvery near Mokedatu. Siddaramaiah will elicit views of the leaders on both, the Centre's proposal as well as the Mokedatu project.

Besides, the chief minister will apprise the leaders of the availability of water in the four reservoirs of the Cauvery in the state – the KRS, the Kabini, the Hemavathi and the Harangi. He will also discuss the contingency plan to be implemented in case the south-west monsoon fails again, the sources added.

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# Namami Gange set for rebranding push

Ganga Jyoti Yatra from Kolkata to Varanasi; roping in Ambassadors on the list for campaign

NISTULA HEBBAR  
JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI

In the third year of the Narendra Modi government, one of its flagship programmes, the ambitious Namami Gange, is set for a rebranding exercise, and pitches from top advertising agencies invited to giving a public relations push over the next few months.

The move, powered by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, aims at a more participatory approach to the Namami Gange (National Mission for a Clean Ganga-NMCG) programme.

"Given past efforts to clean the river [such as Ganga Action Plans] there is also a certain level of scepticism over whether this latest attempt will be successful. There is thus a need to generate public confidence in the proposed programme,"

CM  
K



**For a cleaner future:** A man prays on the bank of the Ganga in Varanasi. • FILE PHOTO

said a note circulated by the NMCG to those wishing to pitch for the project.

## Strong soul connect

"While there is no questioning the reverence in which the river is held, the emotional connect with the

Ganges, for most Indians tends to be restricted to personal ritualistic moments and becomes passive once it is over. Invoking this reverence [aastha] towards the river – without however giving it religious overtones – could be an entry-point to-

wards mass awareness and action towards river clean-up."

"The proposed campaign therefore needs to evoke a strong soul connect with the Ganga and leverage associated emotion to drive active participation to keep the river clean and healthy," the notice further stated.

Ideas like a Ganga Jyoti Yatra (like an Olympic torch run) starting from Kolkata and ending in Varanasi, and roping in brand ambassadors like former Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar are some of the things being discussed.

U.P. Singh, director of NMCG confirmed to *The Hindu* that a long campaign was on the anvil.

"We have invited concepts from the several advertising agencies and are hearing them out," he said.

He added that, "the mes-

sage that cleaning the river Ganga requires participation from everyone hasn't effectively reached out."

## Slow progress

In spite of being a marquee project of the government, the Namami Gange is yet to show visible progress.

Out of a ₹20,000-crore clean-up programme, only ₹2,000 crore has been sanctioned to the NMCG, the executive authority tasked with commissioning treatment plants, cleaning and beautifying the ghats and setting up improved crematoria.

To treat the 12,000 million litres per day (MLD) of sewage emptying into the river, that meanders through 11 States from Uttarakhand to West Bengal, only capacity worth 4,000 MLD exists and of them, only plants with 1,000 MLD capacity are working.

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# Sunkesula barrage goes dry after four decades

Kurnool faces acute drinking water scarcity as inflow from Tungabhadra comes to a standstill

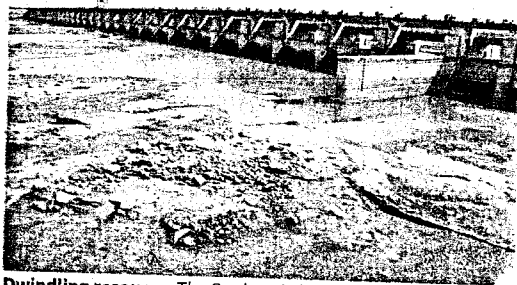
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL

The Sunkesula barrage across Tungabhadra river, about 25 km from Kurnool, has gone dry after a gap of four decades, portraying the severity of the drought and resulting in acute drinking water scarcity in the city.

The barrage, constructed with a storage capacity of 1.20 tmcft, had a meagre storage of 0.030 tmcft on Sunday. A constant flow of about 70 cusecs of water from the Tungabhadra to the Sunkesula barrage is needed to cater to the drinking water needs of the nearly six lakh people in the Kurnool Municipal Corporation limits.

## Meagre supply

The inflow from Tungabhadra has come to a standstill and people of villages along the river are



**Dwindling resource:** The Sunkesula barrage with traces of water on Sunday. ■ U. SUBRAMANYAM

struggling to fetch a pail of water by digging pits in the riverbed.

Most areas in Kurnool city are being supplied water once in four days to a week, and areas under Kallur in Panyam mandal, forming part of the municipal corporation, are getting water once

a fortnight, that too for about an hour.

The water being supplied is muddy and unfit for even a bath, leave alone drinking purposes, says Narayana, a resident of Kallur. The municipal officials are supplying water from a summer storage tank, but the available

water will last only for about a fortnight.

Lack of rainfall and severe drought in Kurnool district, lack of inflows from Tungabhadra river and scanty rainfall in Karnataka led to the drying up of Sunkesula barrage. The only alternative source is Gajuladinne project, having a capacity of 4.50 tmcft at Gonedandla, but water stored in it is 1.22 tmcft at present.

## Second tank

Water available in the Gajuladinne Project and the Sunkesula barrage were released at will to cater to the drinking water needs of Anantapur, meting out a raw deal to Kurnool, according to CPI(M) district secretary K. Prabhakar Reddy.

If water drawal is permitted from the Gajuladinne Project, it can be supplied in

Kurnool city once in four days, he said.

There is an overwhelming demand for a second summer storage tank in Kurnool. The government can sanction an annual allotment of ₹100 crore for two years under the Amruth scheme to construct the summer storage tank, Mr. Reddy said.

The Muchumarri lift irrigation scheme facilitated drawal of water from low levels in Srisailem reservoir for drinking water purposes, but its canals were incomplete, he added.

The government had not kept its promise to supply water from the lift irrigation scheme to Kurnool, he asserted.

If alternative sources were not tapped, drinking water scarcity in Kurnool would persist until the onset of monsoon, he said.

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**TIMES NATION**

## SC stays HC order banning mining in Ganges

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**Dehradun:** The Supreme Court on Friday stayed an order of the Nainital high court delivered in December last year which prohibited any type of mining in the river Ganga in Uttarakhand.

Welcoming the stay order, Uttarakhand government officials said that the

apex court's decision will give a boost to developmental activities in the state as raw material (stones picked up from river bed) would now be available for construction work.

"We will ensure only scientific picking of extra material is done from the river bed in Uttarakhand. Moreover, this will be done only after getting permission from

all levels. Mining has a ripple effect on the overall economy of the state. That is why we had argued before the court that it's necessary to remove extra river bed material to regulate the water flow," Sailesh Bagoli, secretary, mining, told TOI.

A division bench of Justices Rajiv Sharma and Alok Singh of the Nainital high court had in an order dated

December 5, 2016 banned all mining in the Ganga in Uttarakhand as part of a judgement delivered in a case between petitioner Mohd Salim and the state government. The order came as a blow to the entire mining industry in Uttarakhand which employs thousands of people and had contributed almost Rs 30 crore in annual royalties to the state last year.

Subsequently, the state government had filed a Special Leave Petition (SLP) in the Supreme Court seeking lifting of mining ban in Ganga. "No mining takes place between June and October and by the time mining started the high court's ban order came," said state mining department director Vinay Shankar Pandey.

(Inputs: Vineet Upadhyay)

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Tribune  
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# Targeted reforms needed to tackle drought

SRIROOP CHAUDHURI  
AND HARNOOR KAUR

Nothing has drilled deeper to the core of global policy meets over human developmental issues in recent times than the ramified adversities of climate change on lives and lands. Anomalous temperature bumps to drastic declines in precipitation, flash floods to untimely hurricanes, polar ice melting to urban heat islands, climate change is no more just tea-table gossip. But amongst all its manifestations, it is probably drought, or rather the unpredictable recurrence of droughts, that has made climate change a pot boiler.

Long-term global precipitation records and streamflow estimates clearly indicate increasing trend in aridity around the world since the 1950s with escalating drought risk. Recent report of Central Water Commission (CWC, 2016) echoes the same for the nation showing that about 60-70 per cent Indian landmass is under drought. This translates into appalling threats to the irrigation and potable water sector, crops, soils, livestock, forest cover, food supply and every imaginable entity that feeds into human livelihood indices.

The CWC provides detailed accounts of live storage information of 91 groundwater reservoirs across the country, integrating information about their storage position, rainfall and various other data types. During 2015-16, drought was declared in some 18 states including Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana (northern region; underlain by six reservoirs), AP, Karnataka, Telengana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu (southern region; 31 reservoirs), UP, MP, Uttarakhand, and Chhattisgarh (central region; 12 reservoirs), Jharkhand, Odisha, WB and Tripura (eastern region; 15 reservoirs) and Gujarat and Maharashtra (western region; 27 reservoirs). In Karnataka and UP, drought was declared for both kharif and rabi seasons.

Largely, drought is caused by rainfall patterns and rather temporal deficits therein. During 2015, national rainfall deficit (compared to the long-period-average, LPA) was around 14.5 per cent as compared to about 12 per cent in 2013 and about 11 per cent in 2012, which indicates progressive drop in annual rainfall over time leading to rise in drought intensity. The north and west regions show the highest deficits (17 per cent from the LPA) while the east records the lowest (8 per cent) in the country.



It is probably the southern region, with about 15 per cent rainfall deficit from the LPA, which presents the most harrowing view of the groundwater drought in the country. At the end of the monsoon season (30 September 2015), the storage available in the region (17.59 BCM) as well as in individual states (AP, Karnataka, Telengana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu) was less than that of 2014 (36.59 BCM). It was also substantially lower than the decadal average (41.72 BCM). Among the states, Karnataka appears to have suffered the maximum impact with live storage dropping from over 20 BCM as decadal average to about 11 BCM in 2015 (30 September).

North Karnataka had a 20% deficit in rainfall. In Telengana the deficit ranged between 25 and 29 per cent. In Tamil Nadu the deficit went up to 84 per cent (as of 20 April 2016). Presently there is about 12 per cent deficit in annual rainfall in India with about 30 per cent of the landmass under deficit.

Depletions in groundwater reservoirs have also been noted in the western region (Gujarat and Maharashtra). Decadal average in live storage in this region has dropped from 22.52 to 16.83 BCM in 2015, mostly owing to shrinkage in the reservoirs underlying Maharashtra (11.68 to 6.67 BCM in 2015). In Maharashtra, the

rainfall deficit was estimated at around 40 per cent in 2015.

More than 3,200 farmers committed suicide in Maharashtra alone in 2015, largely owing to acute water scarcity, unprecedented crop losses and soaring debt burdens. It was the highest in the state since 2001. According to Rajya Sabha reports (4 March 2014), it equates to about nine deaths daily and between 2014 and 2015, this figure jumped by about 18 per cent. In Karnataka farmer suicides rose from about 300 in 2014 to over 1300 in 2015. Overall, farmer-suicides spiked by about 42 per cent in the country between 2014 and 2015 due to worsening drought situations and resultant debacles in the agrarian economy.

All these figures indicate that drought is real. But the fundamental problem is that drought is an elusive phenomenon as it can take so many forms, ranging from environmental, hydrological, to agricultural drought (farmer suicides are largely ascribed to the latter two categories). It is often difficult to tell the categories apart as one frequently leads to the other. Moreover, it is difficult to mark the exact onset of drought or draw time-lines around it; often the effects are felt well after it is thought to be over. To make things worse, there is hardly a consistent method to quantify drought devoid of subjective bias. This

is mostly because the parameters involved - soil moisture, evapotranspiration, temperature - are not only spatially heterogeneous but largely autoregressive over time as well.

The CWC report provides a good overview of the nationwide drought scenario. However, it does little to shed light on methods used to estimate drought. Neither does it deal much with drought intensity or its projected duration. Also lacking is information on corresponding declines in groundwater-levels or changes in surface water flow parameters. These aspects deserve critical consideration and perhaps the research community across the nation should be invited to look into the specifics. That is to say, allowing them grant money to carry out region-specific research to help the authorities refine their methods.

At the end of monsoon in 2015, available live storage in 91 reservoirs stood at 95.7 BCM against a total live capacity of about 157.8 BCM. At the same time in 2014, available live storage was 124.6 BCM. In 2013, it was a little over 137 BCM, which shows how the nation's reservoirs are being depleted over short spells, needing urgent management actions. It appears from the CWC report that drought has already taken a big bite out of the nation's fresh groundwater reserves. The question is how to help

it? Is it only rainfall deficits or also unleashed groundwater drafting that is aggravating the drought scenario?

Undoubtedly it is a riddle that calls for public-private collaboration in a transparent institutional framework with lucid provisions for adequate R&D. For example, research is needed to understand how 'groundwater drought' affects the base flow to streams and how it propagates through complex hydrological systems at varying spatial and temporal scales. There is urgent need to devise/implement consistent drought indices that can be applied to different observation sites, in different reservoirs, incorporating different hydro-meteorological aspects of drought.

It is commendable to note that the government has put in place various action plans to bolster the irrigation sector. But what really calls for attention is targeted policy reform and enforceable laws to regulate groundwater abstraction which is no lesser a cause of depletion than rainfall deficit. Without it, hopes of rejuvenating an already-endangered system and making good years of sustained damage seem overambitious.

The writers are respectively assistant professor at OP Jindal Global University (and assistant director, Centre for Environment, Sustainability and Human Development) and a first-year student at Jindal Global University (and assistant professor).



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## यमुना में प्रदूषण : रोजाना सुनवाई करेगा NGT

■ वस, नई दिल्ली : एनजीटी ने कहा है कि वह 8 मई से यमुना में प्रदूषण रोकने से जुड़े मुद्दों की रोजाना सुनवाई करेगा। यदि 'मैली से निर्मल यमुना रीवाइटेलाइजेशन प्रोजेक्ट 2017' के निर्देशों के संबंध में किसी विभाग की तरफ से कोई लापरवाही पाई गई तो उसके खिलाफ सख्त कार्रवाई की जाएगी।

एनजीटी अध्यक्ष जस्टिस स्वतंत्र की अगुवाई वाली बेंच ने मनोज मिश्रा की यमुना में प्रदूषण रोकने से जुड़े मामले की सुनवाई करते हुए संबंधित विभागों को यह चेतावनी दी। डीडीए की ओर से उस वक्त ट्रिब्युनल के सामने मौजूद एडवोकेट कुश शर्मा ने बताया कि सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने नदी से जुड़े सारे मामले



एनजीटी के पास वापस ट्रांसफर कर दिए हैं। इसीलिए ट्रिब्युनल ने अब इस पर सोमवार से रोजाना सुनवाई करने की बात कहते हुए सभी विभागों को चेताया है कि वह देखेगा कि 'मैली से निर्मल यमुना रीवाइटेलाइजेशन प्रोजेक्ट 2017' के संबंध में जारी उसके निर्देशों का संबंधित विभागों ने अब तक कितना पालन किया है।