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INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

Building a 21st century institutional architecture for water governance

The Central Water Commission and Central Ground Water Board need to reinvent their role in today's vastly different irrigation and water use scenario

TUSHAAR SHAH

IN JULY 2016, a high level committee constituted by the Narendra Modi government, chaired by the former Planning Commission member Mihir Shah, delivered a comprehensive report on improving water governance in India. Among other things, it called for a 21st century institutional architecture to meet the country's increasingly serious water challenges.

One year on, the report's many wide-ranging recommendations remain largely ignored, even as we now have a debate that's centered around merging the Central Water Commission (CWC) and the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) under a National Water Commission. This, when the real issue highlighted by the committee was about both these organisations risking becoming bystanders to the goings-on in the Indian water scene. Merely merging the two will only yield a larger entity equally at the risk of marginalisation.

CWC was created in 1952 as a technical organisation comprising mainly civil engineers for planning large irrigation and hydropower projects. Similarly, CGWB was founded in 1968 as a groundwater investigation and monitoring agency staffed with hydro-geologists. Both built solid technical capabilities and met the requirements for those times rather well. But the water challenges today are different and far more complex. CWC and CGWB need to break out of their narrow technical groove and morph to

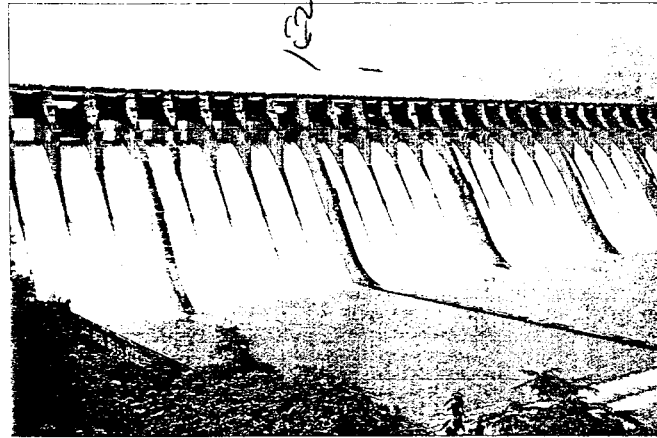
meet these new challenges.

Today, we have almost exhausted our best sites for irrigation and hydro projects. The challenge now is of managing these projects well. On this, CWC should actually be our pathfinder. Since the 1990s, the more money we have invested in irrigation projects, the less has been the actual area irrigated by government canals. CWC ought to know why this has been so and guide states in closing the widening gap between irrigation potential created and utilised. This requires more than just conventional engineering.

It is interesting here that when Shivraj Singh Chauhan wanted Madhya Pradesh's canal systems to irrigate to their potential, CWC wasn't his go-to place for knowhow. Instead, he used a generalist-bureaucrat to squeeze four times more water out of the state's canals, by simply tightening irrigation management. As the custodian of the country's irrigation systems, CWC should have made a thorough assessment of MP's success and launched a nationwide campaign to replicate it in other states.

Likewise with the CGWB. Over past 30 years, India has emerged as the world's largest groundwater economy with the most complex hydro-geological, socio-economic and institutional dimensions. CGWB's job in today's scenario cannot stop just at mapping aquifers. It needs also to map the socio-economics of groundwater exploitation and analyse its institutional and eco-system implications.

In this connection, isn't it odd that some



The Sardar Sarovar dam. Express Photo

of the biggest water initiatives in recent times have originated from chief ministers of states, rather than from our apex technical organisations? Telangana's Mission Kakatiya, Maharashtra's Jaluyukta Shivar, Rajasthan's Jal Swavalamban Yojana or Gujarat's Sardar Patel Sahabhagi Jal Sanchay Yojana are all flagship water conservation schemes of state governments. Neither CWC nor CGWB have had a role in their design or implementation, or even in drawing lessons

of success and failure from these programmes. This is a measure of how far removed the two organisations have become from water action on the ground.

Can merely merging CWC and CGWB into a National Water Commission, then, produce a 21st century architecture for water governance? Hardly. What is needed is effecting deep changes in their operational and management functions, starting with how they view themselves.

CWC has to break out of its limited role of project design and planning, and reinvent itself for a far more ambitious responsibility of irrigation governance. It should be judged not just by irrigation potential created, but also by potential utilised. It must work towards improving the financial viability of canal systems, promoting conjunctive management of surface and ground water, and providing the lead for farmer participatory irrigation management. States, in turn, should not resent CWC for its coercive power, but indulge it for its expertise and referent power.

CGWB similarly must transcend beyond its groundwater investigation and monitoring role. That function remains critical, no doubt, but CGWB has to also learn to preside over a complex groundwater irrigation economy that supports over Rs 4,00,000 crore-worth of annual crop and milk revenues of our predominantly small farmers. The Supreme Court, in 1996, had designated CGWB as India's Central Groundwater Authority. But it made nothing of this godsend opportunity and remained a mere paper tiger.

Transforming CWC and CGWB into truly strategic water management organisations requires changes in their organisational culture and processes. In all such organisations, the new entrants are preoccupied with technical specialities, whereas those reaching the top acquire a broader view of the world. In CWC and CGWB, the opportunities for a broadening of outlook and developing a trans-disciplinary worldview are limited, which needs to change. The top leadership

of CWC and CGWB should be selected, even if from within, on merit and must be given at least five-year terms. Broad-based capacity building needs to be carefully planned for the top management cohort, which would include interactions with leading practitioners of their craft around the world.

How organisations groom their people is, perhaps, also an indicator of how seriously they pursue their mandate. Both CWC and CGWB have their captive training schools, but their limited faculty and training focus means they are stuck in a narrow groove. Reform must begin by preparing their technical professionals for a larger role. The Shah committee recommended induction of social scientists into these organisations. Alternatively, the core technical competencies of these institutions could be retained, along with the regular exposure of their engineers and hydro-geologists to economics, the social sciences, eco-systems and relevant management concepts.

With a stroke of his pen, the Prime Minister may well merge the CWC and CGWB into a National Water Commission. But to expect that doing this will create a 21st century institutional architecture for water governance would be optimistic. The long and arduous road to water governance reform needs careful and painstaking change management within CWC and CGWB.

The writer is Senior Fellow at the International Water Management Institute and was a member of the Mihir Shah Committee.)

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SONOWAL MEETS JAITLEY

Four more deaths, Assam flood toll rises to 73 ¹⁰²⁰

**SAMUDRA GUPTA
KASHYAP**

GUWAHATI, JULY 19

THE TOLL in the Assam floods rose to 73 with four more deaths Wednesday even as the situation improved significantly with the water level of the Brahmaputra receding below the red mark across the state. With around 8,000 people lodged at various

relief camps, 2.67 lakh people in 14 districts were still affected by the floods, an official report said.

Two deaths were reported in Morigaon and one each in South Salmara and Lakhimpur.

Meanwhile, Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal met Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in New Delhi and requested him to release the central share of Rs 1,138 crore for completion of schemes under

the Flood Management Programme (FMP) of the 11th and 12th Five Year Plans. The state has already released its share for 141 schemes under the FMP, Sonowal told Jaitley.

Sonowal, who is on a three-day visit to the national capital, had on Tuesday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Apprising the PM of the situation, Sonowal had requested him to launch a 'Prime Minister's

Special Programme for Flood and Erosion Control' to develop road-cum-embankments on a 5,000 km stretch and ensure regular maintenance and sustainability of the embankments.

Sonowal told Modi that most of the state's existing embankments along the Brahmaputra and other rivers were constructed in the 1950s and had become increasingly vulnerable to breaches.

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Drought shadow looms over deep south

**HARISH DAMODARAN
& AMITABH SINHA**
NEW DELHI, JULY 19

IF MAHARASHTRA, particularly Marathwada, was the epicentre of drought in 2014 and 2015, that has now seemingly shifted deep southward to a stretch covering the old Mysore region and coastal Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

In 2016, south interior

Karnataka recorded 22 per cent deficit rainfall during the south-west monsoon season (June-September), while it was minus 21 per cent for coastal Karnataka, minus 34 per cent for Kerala and 20 per cent for Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. The numbers were even worse — at minus 70, minus 63 and minus 62 per cent each, respectively for the four meteorological subdivisions — for the northeast or 'retreating' monsoon (October-

December), which brings significant amount of rain, especially in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

A repeat scenario looks to be unfolding this year as well. While India as a whole has received an average area-weighted rainfall of 343.4 mm during the current monsoon season until July 19, one per cent more than the historic 'normal' of 338.4 mm for this period, rain has so far been below-normal in south interior

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

WATER LEVELS IN MAJOR CAUVERY RESERVOIRS

(in thousand million cubic-feet)

	Storage Capacity	Live Storage on 19.7.2017	Live Storage on 19.7.2016
Krishna Raja Sagara	45.05	5.61	16.73
Hemavathy	35.76	7.12	15.97
Kabini	15.67	6.39	8.69
Harangi	8.07	4.26	7.70

Source: Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre

Drought shadow looms over deep south

Karnataka (minus 33 per cent), coastal Karnataka (minus 11 per cent), Kerala (minus 24 per cent) and Tamil Nadu (minus 19 per cent).

The result can be seen in water levels in the dams. The four major reservoirs of the Cauvery basin in Karnataka — Krishna Raja Sagara or KRS in Mandya district, Hemavathy (Hassan), Kabini (Mysore) and Harangi (Kodagu) — currently have less water than they had at this time in 2016.

Last year, the Karnataka government was forced to release water from the KRS and Kabini reservoirs to the Mettur dam across the border in Tamil Nadu's Salem district, following a Supreme Court directive. It triggered violent protests in Mysore and Mandya, spilling over to even Bengaluru. Traffic along the Bengaluru-Mysuru expressway came to halt as vehicles with Tamil Nadu registration plates were burnt by pro-Kannada groups who also targeted Tamilian-owned shops and eateries.

This year too, there's great worry. Reservoir levels in the Cauvery basin have fallen lower with back-to-back monsoon failure and Karnataka is headed to Assembly elections in barely eight months. Political temperatures have already been raised, with pro-Kannada groups demanding removal of Hindi signage in all Bangalore Metro sta-

tions and the Siddaramaiah-headed Congress government constituting a committee to examine whether Karnataka could have a separate flag for the state.

If this were not all, the rainfall forecast for the next one week at least is not very optimistic. "There is possibility of some scattered rainfall in south interior Karnataka and Kerala over the coming two days, but it will not be enough to compensate for the current deficit in this area," said Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, head of services at the India Meteorological Department.

The reservoir position is equally, if not more, precarious in Tamil Nadu's main dams — Mettur, Bhavanisagar (Erode), Vaigai (Theni) or Aliyar and Sholayar in Coimbatore district. The rain hasn't been good in either the Nilgiri (the catchment area for Bhavanisagar) or Anaimalai hills (for Aliyar and Sholayar) of the Western Ghats.

While Mettur gets water from the KRS and Kabini, the latter's catchment is mainly in Kerala's Wayanad district. Similarly, the Mullaperiyar dam in Idukki (Kerala) irrigates Theni, Dindigul, Madurai, Sivaganga and Ramanathapuram districts of southern Tamil Nadu, with its waters also feeding the Vaigai dam in Theni. The same goes for the Parambikulam dam, which, while located in Kerala's Palakkad district, largely caters to

the Coimbatore-Erode belt in western Tamil Nadu. The Parambikulam and Mullaperiyar dams are both, in fact, owned, operated and maintained by the Tamil Nadu government — thereby also lending themselves to interstate disputes with Kerala.

What this also means is that the rain failing in one part could impact water levels in dams and reservoirs elsewhere. The effects are cumulative when the monsoon turns out bad in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and southern as well as coastal Karnataka — that too, for a second successive year.

"I haven't seen anything like this. Sadly, it is not receiving adequate attention from the powers-that-be. Even the protests by Tamil Nadu farmers in Delhi do not reflect the real intensity of the crisis," said M Manickam, chairman of the Coimbatore-based Sakthi Sugars Limited.

Among the crops that could be hit are sugarcane (both in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu) and maize (Haveri, Davangere, Chitradurga and Bellary districts are major producers). Milk output could also suffer; the bulk of procurement by cooperatives in Karnataka is from the Mysore-Mandya-Bangalore-Kolar belt. Dairies in Tamil Nadu, too, are reporting near-flat procurement, with farmers struggling to arrange both fodder and water for their animals.

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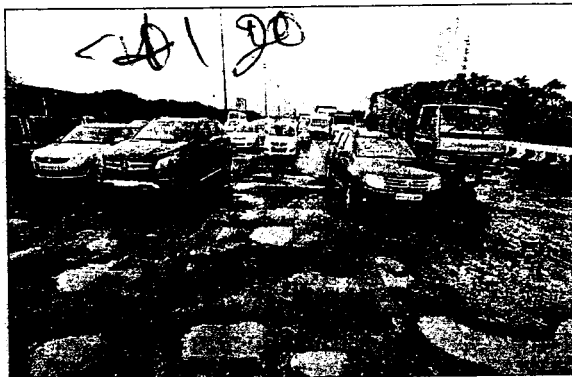
Monsoon covers entire country, but 4 days late

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The monsoon covered the entire country on Wednesday, moving into parts of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan that had remained out of its ambit, four days later than the normal date of July 15.

With the rain system covering the entire country, the India Meteorological Department said a monsoon trough was in place and it passed through Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Sheopur, Pendra and the centre of low pressure formed by the depression that hit Odisha coast on Tuesday night. The trough is an east-west line of low pressure that characterises the monsoon season.

With an average rainfall of 14.1mm across India, Wednesday was the wettest day of the season. The main monsoon action was concentrated in central India, which saw heavy rain spells in the wake of the depression moving across the region. It hit Odisha coast just south of Puri and is moving towards south Rajasthan.



With an average rainfall of 14.1mm across India, Wednesday was the wettest day of the season, with Maharashtra getting much of the rain

By Friday, the depression could bring some rain in north India, including Delhi, east Rajasthan, west Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab

The depression is expected to affect central India for the next five days, with the most widespread rains taking place on

Wednesday and Thursday. By Friday, the system could bring some rain in north India, including Delhi, east Rajasthan, west Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab.

Many of the wettest spots in the country on Wednesday were in Maharashtra, where the rain-deficient Vidarbha region too has been getting good showers over the past few days.

In fact, IMD had a red alert in place for very heavy rains for Vidarbha and Chhattisgarh regions.

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Meanwhile, TN's turn to be singed by drought

With not much cane to crush, mills in the state are bracing for a record short 90-day sugar season

HARISH DAMODARAN
NEW DELHI, JULY 19

FEW CROPS, perhaps, capture the intensity of drought better than sugarcane. Given that this is a crop largely grown under irrigated conditions, one wouldn't expect its production to take a severe knock — except under the most exceptional circumstances when there's no water available to draw from even reservoirs or underground.

We saw this in Maharashtra. Back-to-back droughts resulted in the total cane crushed by mills in the state plummeting from 930.41 lakh tonnes (lt) in the 2014-15 sugar season (October–September) to 742.94 lt in 2015-16 and a mere 373.13 in 2016-17. Sugar output, too, fell correspondingly from 105.14 lt to 84.15 lt and 42 lt.

A similar thing is happening now in Tamil Nadu (TN), which during the last five years has experienced drought in three of them (2012, 2013 and 2016) and seems headed for yet another, if rainfall trends so far for the current southwest monsoon season are any indication.

The consecutive monsoon failures have led to an almost continuous decline in both sugarcane crushed and sugar produced by Tamil Nadu mills (see graphs). Between 2011-12 and 2016-17, the quantity of cane crushed has plunged from 254.55 lt to 113.88 lt, with sugar output also more than halving from 23.79 lt to 10.25 lt. With lack

of water prompting farmers to sharply cut down on plantings, the coming 2017-18 season could register further drop in these numbers.

Being basically a tropical crop that thrives in warm conditions (although requiring more water), cane yields in TN are roughly two-thirds more than the average for sub-tropical states such as Uttar Pradesh, where the winter months act as a dampener for plant growth and sucrose accumulation. Mills in TN, therefore, have enough cane to be able to crush for 250-260 days in a normal year. They start crushing from early-October and run until mid-June.

In the last season, however, the TN mills could run for just 150-160 days. They began crushing operations only towards end-November and had to wind up by April. "In 2017-18, we will have only a 90-day season, with crushing starting sometime in end-December and finishing by March. There's hardly any cane available for crushing," said M Manickam, chairman of the Coimbatore-based Sakthi Sugars Ltd.

Moreover, mills are also having to crush immature cane, as farmers have no water to grow the crop for its full duration of about 12 months. "The cane that my mill crushed in April this time should ideally have been crushed in October. So, it was crushed six months early, which also translates into sugar recovery of just 6-6.5 per cent as against the normal of 9-9.5 per cent," added Manickam.

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SYL: Akali Dal warns against any negotiation with Haryana 87-2e

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, 19 JULY

Days after the Supreme Court directed Punjab to obey orders passed by it on the construction of remaining portion of Sutlej-Yamuna Link link canal in the state, the Shiromani Akali Dal on Wednesday warned CM Captain Amarinder Singh against any negotiation with Haryana which would take away even one drop of water from Punjab.

After the resolution passed by SAD political affairs committee (PAC) warned against any negotiation with Haryana, party leader and former chief minister Parkash Singh Badal said earlier also Punjab's river waters had been taken away from the State during Congress rule.

"We would like to make it clear to everyone that Punjab does not have any excess water and that there is no question of construction of the SYL canal. This will not be allowed under any circumstances," he told reporters. Badal said water was lifeline of Punjab which is the grain bowl of India. "Pun-



jab can't give a drop of water to anyone," he added.

On the reported Punjab government move to impose new taxes, the SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal said the Capt Amarinder government presented a fake budget in the Assembly. "They (state government) presented a budget which didn't impose new taxes. But now they intend to charge new taxes as there is gap of Rs 20,000 Crore in the expenditure and revenue," he said.

Claiming political vendetta against Akali workers, the PAC decided to launch a movement to raise its voice against the alleged excesses being committed against Akali workers by Congressmen.

The meeting of the PAC, which was presided over by

Badal, passed a resolution that party president Sukhbir would launch the movement from Dear Baba Nanak on July 25 and henceforth visit families affected by the alleged Congress excesses across the state.

"The SAD will start a mass movement to force the Congress government to stop its workers from targeting Akalis. We will form committees in all districts to help victims. We are also evolving a system to contest all false cases registered against our workers besides conducting an exercise to evaluate the extent of the false cases," Sukhbir said. The former CM Badal announced he would personally meet Akali workers to listen to their grievances twice a month for two days each in the party office.

20-7-17

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Conserving water, the ancient way

Tamil Nadu's temple inscriptions provide some handy drought-management advice



PRADEEP CHAKRAVARTHI

Can droughts experienced centuries ago teach us ways to handle the present ones? They can if we care to look in the right place – for instance, the walls of temples in Tamil Nadu. Temples today are primarily religious monuments, occasionally visited for their art and architecture. However, in the past, their walls served as record-keepers. Inscriptions on Tamil Nadu's temples record administrative and social decisions from a time when they were a seat of authority for the local community.

Inscriptions connected to irrigation in Tamil Nadu concern two broad zones, the Cauvery delta and the Tamirabarani delta. The Cauvery delta was more fertile and larger – with more tributaries – but the number of drought-related inscriptions here are more in number than the Tamirabarani delta. About 1,000 years ago, during the zenith of the Chola power, irrigation in the Cauvery delta was through the many tributaries of the river and smaller canals.

Reverence for the resource

The Tamirabarani region was much more water-starved and gives us astonishing data on what we need to do. Inscriptions from 700-1,000 years ago, connected to water conservation in temples at places like Manarkovil, Cherannmahadevi, Tirukurungudi, Kovilpatti, and Pudukkottai, attest to a few aspects.

Temple inscriptions were always documents connected with the sale, transfer and maintenance of irrigated lands. Today, we consider water to be a right. However, in the older traditions, it was a representation of god that residents were duty-bound to protect and conserve. Further, the respect for water transcended the public sphere and was part of individual homes as well. As recently as the 1970s, I remember older women drawing water from the wells pouring the first pot back into them.

In the Pandya empire, water conservation was a completely local affair. The entire community, through the elected temple *mahasabha*, managed it. This meant that there was constant supervision, ownership and responsibility. All systems and processes were sustained through an emotional connection with the resource.

Water from the Tamirabarani and the Vagai rivers was taken through channels into

formations like *eris* (small lakes) and *per-eris* (bigger lakes). Channels created square parcels of lands called *sadirams* and they were subdivided into smaller *padagams* of land, all of which had numbers. There were as many as 20-24 *padagams* in a *sadiram*. They were taxed differently based on how fertile they were – a system far more complex and farmer-friendly than today!

Care for the local terrain

Every tank had multiple weirs, always built in consonance with the local terrain, to drain out excess water. Using these, farmers irrigated the fields. There were complex calculations on allocation by turns (*murai*) and hours of supply (*nir nalgai*). The interests of the boatmen in the lower estuaries and ports were also taken care of so that there was enough water there to permit them to bring boats up the river. The upper reaches had a higher number of large tanks which fed water into the smaller ones, tanks and ponds before it finally drained into the sea. As a result, during floods, the limits were rarely breached, and during droughts, each tank had water.

Maintenance of the tanks through desilting and enlargement and building and maintaining of new canals was a continuous process. More than a hundred inscriptions across the region deal exclusively with this. Fishing rights for the lakes helped defray maintenance costs. Revenues were high enough for the excess profits to be deployed in building larger halls in temples that could be used for public functions.

In Srivilliputhur, every able-bodied man was expected to participate in such operations. Some inscriptions show that maintenance was a local responsibility and not that of the king. In fact, many capital-intensive projects were funded by the dancing women of temples.

Many inscriptions also talk of reclaimed lands and tax concessions provided following natural disasters and how, after a disaster, the community quickly acted together to set the system right.

True, the inscriptions don't paint a utopian world. They talk about disputes related to water sharing and taxes; deaths that happened during desilting; and fights over excess water for more rounds of crops. However, these disputes were quickly resolved and in a way that the river or tank was respected.

Today, we may have advanced in technology but we could pick some best practices from long ago.

Pradeep Chakravarthi, who is based in Chennai, runs a heritage tour company and does management consulting

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गंगा क्षेत्र से बिना अनुमति भूजल निकासी पर प्रतिबंध

नई दिल्ली | विशेष संवाददाता

हि-20-7-17
फैसला

एनजीटी ने गंगा की डूब वाले इलाके में औद्योगिक और वाणिज्यिक उद्देश्यों के लिए केंद्रीय भूजल प्राधिकरण (सीजीडब्ल्यूए) को अनुमति के बिना भूजल निकासी पर पूरी तरह प्रतिबंध लगा दिया है।

एनजीटी ने कहा कि सीजीडब्ल्यूए को सरकार की नीति के मुताबिक कृषि और अन्य उद्देश्यों के लिए भूजल निकासी का नियमन करना चाहिए। जस्टिस स्वतंत्र कुमार की अध्यक्षता वाली पीठ ने कहा कि भूजल की अत्यधिक निकासी का पर्यावरण एवं नदी की सेहत पर प्रतिकूल असर पड़ेगा। पर्यावरण निदेशालय के एक

- एनजीटी का फैसला, केंद्रीय भूजल प्राधिकरण से इजाजत लेनी होगी
- एनजीटी ने भूजल के दोहन को गंगा में प्रदूषण का कारण बताया

अध्ययन का हवाला देते हुए अधिकरण ने कहा कि उत्तर प्रदेश में 820 ब्लॉक में 659 ब्लॉक भूजल का स्तर घटने से प्रभावित हुए, जबकि 43 जिलों को संवेदनशील और अत्यधिक दोहन वाली श्रेणी में रखा गया। एनजीटी के मुताबिक कानपुर, मेरठ, गाजियाबाद, नोएडा, आगरा, लखनऊ और वाराणसी भूजल के गिरते स्तर से गंभीर रूप से प्रभावित हुए हैं।