

Raise in Narmada dam height cleared

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Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Dec. 26. — The environment sub-group of Narmada Control Authority today cleared the proposal to increase the Narmada Dam height by seven more metres.

If the water resource ministry accepts the recommendation, the height of the Narmada dam will go up from 103 metres to 110 metres, submerging an additional area of 11,000 hectares.

The impact assessment committee, also known as the environment sub-group of Narmada Control Authority, today had a meeting to decide on the proposal of the Sardar Sarovar Project authority to increase the height.

The government had constituted two sub groups on the directions of the Supreme Court, a rehabilitation sub group and environment sub group. Any addition to the project has to be cleared by these two sub-groups before work starts. This is just a beginning. The rehabilitation sub group will have a

meeting next week and give its final recommendation. The water resource ministry will take the final decision.

According to the government, the increase in height will increase the power generation capacity. The height of 110 metres is considered critical for getting economic benefits in terms of power generation, irrigation and water supply, said a senior ministry official.

Most non-governmental organisations, however, termed the decision a political move aimed at the coming parliamentary elections. The issue affects Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. There is no need to increase the height of the project as it would bring no additional benefit, said the co-ordinator of South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, Mr Himanshu Thakkar.

There is no point increasing the height when the project has not built infrastructure to harness additional water for increasing power, irrigation and drinking water supply, Mr Thakkar added.

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SETTLING A DUSTY PROBLEM

19/12

A YEAR AGO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) issued a report on the 'Asian Brown cloud', creating the image of a vast blanket of pollution choking the Indian sub-continent. This cloud of aerosols created by human activity would, it was claimed, have disastrous effects on the climate, including on the monsoon rain. Aerosols, which are fine particles in the atmosphere, can be natural or human-made. Winds whip up sand and dust from the ground, and also carry vast quantities of fine sea salt into the air. Motor vehicle fumes, and the burning of coal, other fossil fuels and biofuels such as wood, generate fine carbon particles. Emissions from industries can produce sulphate and nitrate particles. By scattering or absorbing the light coming from the sun or being reflected back into space from the Earth, these aerosols can have an impact on the climate. But such effects depend on the nature of aerosols present as well as their size and concentration. Aerosol levels, composition and geographical spread vary greatly from season to season and year to year. Natural aerosols may often predominate. So the question is whether the anthropogenic aerosols (that is, those generated by humans) are of such a level and kind that they have a significant impact on the climate in the way greenhouse gases are causing global warming.

The UNEP report left the impression that the 'cloud' of anthropogenic aerosols from Asia was having such an impact. Indian scientists disagree, pointing out that erroneous conclusions were being drawn largely from a single data collection campaign over the Indian Ocean and that such forms of aerosol pollution were present in other parts of the world too. A paper by American researchers published recently in a scientific journal notes that pollution plumes off

the east coast of the United States could be just as intense as those over India and other parts of Asia. Although there is greater recognition that the 'atmospheric brown cloud' (as it is now called) is a global phenomenon, the focus on India and China as large contributors to human-made, and by implication avoidable, aerosol pollution persists. Such concern is not without reason. The declining air quality in towns and cities across India is all too obvious. It is not just vehicles and industries that enhance aerosol levels in the air. It may be that the burning of dung, wood and other biological material poses a more widespread and less easily controlled problem.

India therefore needs a sustained research programme of its own to quantify and understand aerosols all over the country. The Indian Space Research Organisation has been studying this subject over the past two decades, but at just a few places. It has plans for a countrywide multi-institutional campaign next year to collect aerosol data using ground-based sensors. It is also known to be considering similar shipborne and aerial campaigns for a later stage. There have been press reports that the India Meteorological Department is to acquire ground instruments for continual aerosol measurements. Both steps are welcome. However, it would probably help to have a single overarching programme so that aerosol data collection and its utilisation for properly reviewed research projects across institutions can be coordinated and brought to bear on this problem. The Department of Science and Technology's successful Indian Climate Research Programme offers a good model. In any case, irrespective of the impact on the climate, identifying the sources of anthropogenic aerosols and taking steps to reduce their levels is an imperative if air quality is to be improved in India.

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THE HINDU

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wide angle

SALMAN HAIDAR

Setback to environment

AN announcement from Moscow that Russia was unlikely to ratify the Kyoto Protocol has more or less extinguished hope for this agreement on safeguarding the environment. The labour that went into its making in 1997, the expectations it generated, have all fallen by the wayside. The Kyoto Protocol has long been teetering on the brink, ever since the Bush administration withdrew support and campaigned against its supposed weaknesses, especially the favourable provisions for the developing countries. The Russian decision, if it finally goes through, would make it impossible for the agreement to come into effect. It can be activated only when ratification is completed by industrialised countries responsible for at least 55 per cent of the polluting emissions of the base year 1990: if USA and Russia both keep out, this threshold cannot be reached.

The Protocol is only one of a number of international agreements that the current US administration has targeted, on the basis that they do not serve the country's national interest. Earlier administrations may have considered these often complicated, strenuously negotiated agreements as part of its enlightened self-interest in global affairs, but not today. A stricter accounting and a more hard nosed pursuit of immediate interest has characterised the present US approach, with a striking willingness to go it alone and adopt unilateral courses of action. In the process, standing commitments may not always be regarded as sacrosanct. Others have been tempted to follow where America has shown the way: even India has not been immune from this temptation, as was seen in the sentiment generated here following unilateral and preemptive US actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, to the effect that if they can do it, why not us. The Russian statement on Kyoto is in comparable vein, looking only to its own immediate concerns and short term interests. It is similar, too, in playing up as a defect of Kyoto the apparent favours shown in the Protocol to developing countries.

Nothing has been said officially in Washington about the imminent demise of the Protocol but some commentators have tried to minimise its significance. They characterise it as something important in its time but no longer critical today: it has already made its contribution by promoting legislation and policy decisions on curbing emissions. It suffers from the defect of a short duration, running only until 2012, and from its failure to place any restraints on major developing countries. This latter point is something of a theme song for the Protocol's opponents: in their perception, China, India and Brazil, in particular, have got away with a lot, and should be subject to close regulation, as are the industrialised countries. Such arguments are essentially self-regarding and amount to little more than an excuse to re-open issues that were extensively discussed at Kyoto and formed part of the give and take of the final agreement. The USA and Russia signed the treaty in full knowledge of its provisions and if they do not wish to proceed further today, it is unnecessary to try to attach blame to the developing countries for this decision.

An innovative and imaginative part of the Kyoto Protocol is the provision to trade in credits for reducing emissions. A country that did better than its minimum obligation under the treaty could be compensated by those that did not. This feature could have been a big incentive for Russia in particular, whose industrial production had declined and which was trying to re-tool and modernise its industrial plant at the time. Today this may be less of an incentive for Russia as it has moved a long way in the last few years, which could add to its readiness to withdraw. With it, this useful provision of Kyoto will become even more difficult to put into operation: it was a complex undertaking at the best of times, requiring international cooperation in which Russia had a key role.

The interests of the developing countries are closely engaged in the Kyoto Protocol. It recognises that it is the industrialised countries, the major polluters today, who must take the lead in curbing emissions. This is only appropriate, for in their crucial period of development they have had the benefit of being able to grow without any environmental restraints. It has been different for the developing countries now on the path of industrialisation. They have been doubly affected, first by paying high prices for industrial equipment bought from the industrialised world, and then by being led towards discarding that equipment in favour of more expensive, environmentally acceptable replacements. They sought, and obtained, time at Kyoto to make the necessary adjustments. They also sought favourable terms to develop and transfer new, environmentally sound technologies to the poor countries. Now even the limited exemptions they obtained are under attack.

A few hopes remain for Kyoto. Russia's "no" may not be definitive and could be a negotiating ploy. The EU has said no matter what happens elsewhere, it will remain on course with its policy to put a ceiling on emissions and to reach national targets by investing in emission-reducing projects in other countries. But such last ditch hopes notwithstanding, there is much to regret in the backsliding on the Protocol by important countries that had earlier signed up on it.

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Continuum
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PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY ✓

TO THE GLOBAL community of biologists and naturalists, the confirmed spotting of the long legged warbler *Trichocichla rufa* in Fiji after it was thought extinct for nearly 110 years is as exciting a moment as some of the earliest discoveries of the natural world by Darwin. Ornithologists working in India have had their own happy moments. They spotted the Jerdon's Courser in Andhra Pradesh in 1986 (after believing it to be permanently lost for 86 years) and, more recently, found the forest owlet in Maharashtra after 113 years. Even the rediscovery of a species is a landmark event today, as countries across the world race to industrialise often at the cost of their natural riches. It must come as a sobering truth to leaders of rich and poor nations that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) has on its Red List no less than 12,000 species of plants and animals threatened with extinction on the planet. Future generations of humans are at risk of permanently losing over 1,130 species of mammals, which constitute 23 per cent of recorded species, and over 1,190 species of birds, or 12 per cent of all known bird species.

The growing interest in the natural environment is marked by intensive scientific studies and the active involvement of the younger generation in preserving what is rightfully its heritage. Scientists have been learning continuously from plants and animals. Conservation issues are no longer viewed from the perspective of preserving as exotica what is left of the world's flora and fauna. This wealth of genetic material in the living world — "nature's infinite book of secrecy," in the words of Shakespeare — is poised to help medical science make major breakthroughs. Research reported in leading journals shows that antibiotics naturally produced by frogs could hold clues to de-

veloping miracle drugs against infection, while a species such as a tropical cone snail is believed to contain in its venom chemical secrets that might help the production of new painkillers.

Biodiversity, with which the country is richly endowed, could do with more active protection. Scientists are alarmed that the clandestine stripping of biologically rich habitat in the Western Ghats and the Northeast for commercial exploitation could be sending species to their doom before they are even discovered. The reporting of a new genus of frog in the Sahyadris in recent weeks, unrelated to any other frog species in the region, strengthens their apprehensions. A ray of hope comes in the form of the National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan, which awaits formal sanction from the Union Government. Together with the recently notified National Biodiversity Act, it seeks to involve the States and local communities in salvaging many threatened areas from permanent destruction, including wetlands and the oceans. Under the law, even corporations benefiting from the research done using flora and fauna would have to share their profits with the National Biodiversity Authority. The States would have to declare the sensitive zones as "heritage sites" and keep some areas pristine. Communities can now rightfully demand from the Government at the Centre and in the States the resources to help wean away those who need to exploit the forests and the seas for sustenance. Such action is critical to sustainable conservation. Efforts to protect habitat from the pressure of a growing population have failed in some States even under flagship programmes like Project Tiger partly on account of poor rehabilitation options for tribals who do the bidding of poachers and loggers. If politicians and bureaucrats get closely involved in sustainable conservation, more species could live on.

Divisions over emissions

By Andrew C. Revkin

SINCE IT was negotiated in Japan in 1997, the Kyoto Protocol, the first treaty that would require countries to curb emissions linked to global warming, has lingered in an indeterminate state, between enactment and outright rejection.

On Tuesday, its prospects were dealt what may have been a fatal blow when a top Russian official said that his country would not ratify it. But experts on climate and diplomacy say that whether the treaty is ever enacted matters less every day.

Even without approval by the United States and Russia — first and fourth on lists of the world's largest emitters of heat-trapping "greenhouse" gases — the treaty has already changed the world in small but significant ways that will be hard to reverse, these experts say. And because its terms extend only to 2012 in any case, they add, new approaches must be developed now if atmospheric levels of the gases are ever to stabilise.

The Protocol has been approved by 120 countries but was rejected by the U.S. President, George W. Bush, in 2001. Without the United States, the only way to reach a threshold for enactment under the treaty's complicated terms was with Russian participation.

If enacted, it would give industrialised countries until 2012 to reduce their combined emissions of carbon

dioxide and other heat-trapping gases more than 5 per cent below 1990 levels.

The possibility remains that Tuesday's statement by the Russian official, Andrei Illarionov, the top economic adviser to President Vladimir Putin, was just a negotiating ploy, aimed at extracting as many concessions as possible from the European Union and Japan, the treaty's

dard is whether this puts the world on a path to solving a long-term problem. Other multilateral regimes dealing with huge complex problems, like the World Trade Organisation, have taken 45 or 50 years to get established.

Mr. Sandalow and other experts noted that the European Union had already passed a law requiring a cap and credit-trading system for the

Opponents of the treaty acknowledge that it has already made a difference, though they say it is a harmful one. "Kyoto is dead and has been dead, but that doesn't mean that it hasn't done some real damage and won't continue to do some real damage," said Myron Ebell, a climate policy analyst for the Competitive Enterprise Institute, an industry-backed group that opposes regulatory solutions to environmental problems.

"If global warming turns out to be a problem, which I doubt, it won't be solved by making ourselves poorer through energy rationing," he said. "It will be solved through building resilience and capability into society and through long-term technological innovation and transformation."

Critics of this view say the one feature of the Kyoto treaty that cannot be jettisoned is a ceiling on emissions. Without limits, they said, there will be no incentive for industry to innovate and find the cheapest, most effective ways to limit human impact on the atmosphere, said David D. Doniger, the climate-policy director of the Natural Resources Defence Council, a private environmental group.

"If the United States had invented the catalytic converter but not passed clean-air laws," he said, "it would still be sitting on a shelf and we'd still be choking in smog." — *New York Times News Service.*

The Kyoto Protocol has been dealt a blow by Russia's threat not to ratify it.

heat-trapping gases starting in 2005 that will follow the pattern laid out by the Kyoto Protocol no matter what happens with the treaty.

Spurred by the prospect of international curbs on emissions, many companies with long-term business plans have started changing practices and adjusting investments to focus on improving energy efficiency. (Carbon dioxide, the main heat-trapping gas, comes largely from burning coal and oil.)

Even in the United States, where Mr. Bush and the Republican-controlled Congress strongly oppose the treaty, legislation that would require milder restrictions on emissions than those in the Kyoto treaty has gained some momentum, with a recent vote on one such bill getting 43 senators' votes.

main boosters.

On Wednesday, a lower-level official, Mukhamed Tsikanov, a Deputy Economics Minister, sounded a note of hope for the treaty, declaring, "There are no decisions about ratification apart from the fact that we are moving towards ratification." Mr. Putin, meanwhile, remained silent.

But regardless of which way Russia steps, the process of moving the world toward limiting releases of the gases after more than a century of relentless increases has clearly begun, said David B. Sandalow, a guest scholar at the Brookings Institution and an assistant secretary of state during the Clinton administration who worked on the treaty.

"The standard of success isn't whether the first treaty out of the box sails through," he said. "The stan-

Mercury dumping: Tragedy awaits

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 4

INDIA is fast becoming the world's dumping ground for toxic mercury. While developed countries are phasing out mercury, India's consumption has doubled in the last decade. Imports have gone up six times in seven years and worse, India has no regulatory mechanism.

India is now the second largest user of mercury in the world (170-190 tonnes a year) after the US (372 tonnes). Import of organomercury compounds like pesticides have gone up more than 1,500 times. On the other hand, global mercury use has gone down from 5,356 tonnes in 1990 to 2,700 tonnes in 2000.

"We are rapidly becoming the dumping ground of the

world's mercury. At this rate we will become the world's dirt capital," said Sunita Narain, director, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) said on Monday.

"Mercury can cause severe damage to the central nervous system, lungs and kidneys. There is need to do a nationwide study," said J.S. Chopra, president, Neurological Society of India. Europe has decided to phase out all its chlor-alkali (caustic soda) plants and has 13,000 tonnes of mercury that it intends to discard. In seven years, it has sold 3,000 tonnes to India. The other regular exporters are Spain, UK, Russia, Italy and US.

How does Europe manage to send consignments to India, considering they are signatories to the Basel convention

that prohibits sale of hazardous waste? CSE claims it has signed an agreement with the biggest mercury mine of Spain to circumvent this. The mine will buy 13,000 tonnes of mercury from a chlor-alkali plant and put in place of mined mercury, making it pure mercury that can be dumped.

CSE has marked mercury hot spots in the country after it discovered that the main user of mercury plants did not account for 90 per cent of the mercury they were using.

A collation of sporadic studies shows it is the coastal areas that are at maximum risk. Mercury pollution is caused by things we use everyday—mercury cells, pesticides, electrical fittings, thermometers, dental amalgam and paints. Consumption of these things is go-

ing up rapidly—sales of mercury vapour lamps have gone up from 2,100 to 0.12 million, thermostats from 1.73 to 2.51 million and button cells from 17.1 to 91 million.

Making dumping easier is the fact that industries are completely unregulated. In the name of Government action, there has been a draft notification to phase out mercury from consumer products, but no action has been taken so far.

In the 2003 Union Budget, tax exemptions for importing membrane cell components to mercury cell plants were granted. This was another wake-up call for industry to clean up its act before the country faces a disaster like Japan's Minamata tragedy where thousands lost their lives and were maimed by mercury poisoning.

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INDIAN EXPRESS

India a toxic mercury dump: CSE

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Nov. 3. — According to a study conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment, fish in the coastal waters of the country have been diagnosed to have a high quantity of mercury in them.

Speaking at a press conference, the co-chairman of UNEP, Dr RC Srivastava, said: "Even fillings in the teeth have been found to have mercury content to the extent of 52 per cent of their composition and it can be fatal and may cause chest pains, abdominal cramps, lethargy and neurological problems."

The CSE revealed that India was becoming a toxic mercury dumping ground for the world. While developed countries are substituting mercury-based processes and products because of public health concerns, India has in-

creased its consumption and has become the highest user, with imports increasing six fold in the past seven years.

"Mercury contamination in the blood takes three days to be emitted out of the body. If it enters the body tissue it takes 90 days and 20 years if it enters the brain. Unlike other chemicals, mercury passes through the placental barrier and blood-brain barrier in pregnant women to pass onto the unborn child causing severe and permanent brain and central nervous system damage," informed the President of the Indian Neurology society, Dr JS Chopra.

"Lack of adequate safeguards and public awareness can lead to an insurmountable problem. Employees in hospitals and even in crematoria have been diagnosed with mercury contamination. If a thermometer breaks, the 1 gram of mercury in the air can affect all present in the room. Mercury va-

pouring from burning coals also can affect workers in thermal power plant and crematoria," added Mr Chopra.

The CSE associate director M Chandra Bhushan, who has done the study, said: "India has become the biggest consumer of mercury displacing the USA. It uses 50 per cent of global production and processes, 69 per cent of mercury even after knowing that mercury is a confirmed neuro-toxicant as it severely damages brain function."

Mercury imports to India have more than doubled between 1996 and 2002 from 254 tons per annum to 531 tons per annum. Organo-mercury compounds like pesticides, slimicides and biocides imports have increased by 1,500 times. "Is this the eight per cent growth that Indian industry is promising us? We'll become the dirt capital if the situation prevails," CSE director, Sunita Narain said.

Climate Challenge

Poorer Nations Must Hang Together

By R K Pachauri

11-16
23/10

It was a little over a year ago that around 70,000 persons, including heads of states from several countries, converged on Johannesburg for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. One of the spectacles that several participants witnessed, and which was reported widely in the media worldwide, was the burning of a large pile of sugar imported from Europe. The farmers of Africa were protesting against the huge subsidies provided to agriculture in Europe, which have apparently made the whole of Africa dependent on food imports from the North, wiping out the livelihoods of farmers on that continent.

Anyone who sensed the strong sentiment behind this incident in Johannesburg would readily understand the firm stand that the developing countries took at Cancun in the WTO meeting recently. While several issues remained unresolved during this meeting, the most contentious subject on which an agreement could not be reached related to the phasing out of subsidies on agriculture by the developed countries. Some inferences can be drawn now a month after the Cancun meeting ended inconclusively. First, while Cancun represents a major setback, it is not necessarily the end of the road in the ongoing Doha round of negotiations under the WTO. Our commerce minister Arun Jaitley has voiced this view. This means that there is considerable work to be done, and the government of India would do well to seek the best expertise available in the country.

The second observation that could be put forward is that perhaps for the first time in a critical area of international negotiations, the major developed countries stuck together without breaking rank, despite concerted efforts to divide them. Consequently, the developed countries have learned a lesson, which may impact on the course of future negotiations under the WTO, and perhaps in other areas as well where multilateral agreements are under negotiation.

The most unfavourable outcome of Cancun could be a lasting impasse in negotiations under the WTO, which would certainly restrict international trade and continue with agricultural subsidies in the developed countries to the detriment of the developing world. Even more serious would be the implications for negotiations in other areas where multilateral action is critically overdue. Most prominent among these is the urgency of an agreement to reduce the emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) under the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

As it happens, the worst impacts of climate change are likely to be felt in the developing countries, and by the poorest com-

munities in all countries. A delay in reduction of emissions to stabilise the concentration of GHGs in the earth's atmosphere essentially implies an intensification and prolongation of the impacts of climate change, which would affect health, agriculture and availability of water in several parts of the world; sea level rise is already threatening societies in the small island states and coastal areas worldwide. A weakening of the multilateral system under the United Nations, for instance, would in the end leave no winners. As common inhabitants of spaceship earth we need global agreements in areas where the actions of any society threaten on the welfare of any other.

A stronger affirmation of support to multilateral bodies and their effectiveness would create conditions whereby humanity may rise above narrow interests and illusory short-term gains. The alternative would be social disorder, political tensions and threats to global security. In the year 2005, negotiations are scheduled to begin for an agreement on the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, beginning after 2012. And yet, it is not clear whether the Kyoto Protocol will be ratified. The outcome is entirely in the hands of Russia, which has still not revealed any decision on ratification or otherwise.



Irrespective of whether the Kyoto Protocol comes into existence or not, in the next round of negotiations growing pressures would be applied on the developing countries, particularly China, India and Brazil, to take on certain commitments for limiting the emissions of GHGs. Would the same unity among developing countries that was exhibited

in Cancun remain at work in climate change negotiations also? And, if there is a complete stand-off between North and South, can we at all escape the ill-effects of climate change in every corner of the globe? By contrast, the swift action that was taken globally for implementation of the Montreal Protocol stands out as a remarkably prompt initiative in multilateral decision-making.

However, the question could be asked legitimately whether the Montreal Protocol received swift global support only because it threatened the countries of the developed world far more seriously than societies living in the tropical and sub-tropical regions.

Countries like India also need substantial analysis on issue like linking trade and environment to forestall other barriers being erected by the North. There is at least a large degree of understanding today that poverty on a wide scale anywhere in the world is a threat to the world as a whole. A fair and equitable trading regime is the most effective means to reduce poverty and an essential step in creating favourable conditions for multilateral initiatives, which must prevail to overcome the critical challenges facing the world today.

Twin norms plea for pesticide in food

MONOBINA GUPTA

New Delhi, Oct. 10: Adding fresh fizz to the soft drink controversy, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in its presentation before the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) today recommended two different sets of norms for nutritious and non-nutritious food while fixing maximum pesticide residue levels.

CSE president Sumita Narain told the JPC that with our food basket containing such a huge amount of pesticides, the situation has now boiled down to a "trade-off" between nutrition and poison. It has, therefore, become necessary to make a distinction between nutritious and non-nutritious food.

The government, the CSE suggested, can relax the norms for pesticide residue levels in essential nutritious food. It should, however, prescribe stringent norms to keep the level down in non-nutritious

food like soft drinks. For instance, one cannot substitute apple with coke or even orange juice with coke, the CSE said.

Narain argued that an increasing use of pesticides in the cultivation of fruits and vegetables has led to a high level of pesticide residues in essential food. A reversal of this is not possible. What is, however, possible is restricting the intake of pesticides from a variety of other non-essential foodstuff, which includes soft drinks.

A JPC was instituted in August following an exposé by the CSE on the high levels of pesticide residues in 12 brands of soft drinks, including Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Limca and Thums Up.

The first meeting of the JPC took place last month and the second began yesterday with a presentation from the food processing ministry.

The ministry argued that it was not possible to stick to European Union

norms as that would mean changing the entire pattern of agriculture, which is dependent on fertilisers and pesticides. Conformity with EU norms would mean importing agricultural raw material, it said.

Investigations have shown that almost all foodstuff consumed daily is contaminated by pesticides. Drinking water, too, continues to be hazardous.

The Bureau of Indian Standards has set norms for bottled water under the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act but standards for drinking water remain voluntary.

Drinking water comes under the urban development ministry, and the Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organisation under it lays down guidelines for its quality.

Municipalities and public health departments in urban areas and the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mis-

sions in rural areas are expected to follow these guidelines.

"But water is a state subject and the role of the ministry and the CPHEEO is, therefore, merely recommendatory in nature. It is for the state governments to adopt and enforce these standards," a CSE official said.

Summons for Cola giants

Coke and Pepsi officials may be part of the trade delegation that will be summoned for the JPC hearing charges that the cola majors were selling soft drinks laced with pesticides.

After a two-and-a-half-hour meeting of the committee, its chairman Sharad Pawar indicated that the delegation — drawn from the CII and the Ficci — that will be called for deposition might include soft drink officials. "(The) JPC has no hesitation in meeting Coke and Pepsi," he said.

Disaster looms large as Ganga changes course

Aloke Banerjee
Kolkata, October 4

IMAGINE THE fertile lands of South Bengal gradually turning into a desert; Farakka barrage lying redundant and rusting; the historic Malda town and large parts of the district wiped out; the Kolkata and Haldia ports becoming non-operational leading to an economic disaster; and all north-eastern

states cut off from the rest of the country.

A 50-metre long embankment erected at Panchanandapur in Malda separates South Bengal from an imaginary situation and a devastating reality like this. Erected last year, to keep the 15 km-wide raging Ganga from merging with Pagla, this feeble embankment is civilisator's last line of defence.

ments, much longer and more powerful than the present one, have been washed away by Ganga, which is steadily moving eastward, eager to unite with Pagla.

"Once this happens, Ganga will flow through Padma. This will merge with Parakka barrage receiving little water to keep it running. Malda town, barely 24 kilometres from here, will be wiped out of existence in a

couple of years from now," observed Kaliachak-II BDO Shantanu Naha.

Rushing out of Rajmahal Hills, Ganga has been steadily shifting, gobbling up villages and prime agricultural land on its way. The erosion at Panchanandapur this year has been swift. It began from Sakullapur and Jot Kosturi villages of Bangitola gram panchayat on July 6. Since then it has eroded

about four kilometres.

On August 3, it approached Ganga Bhavan in Panchanandapur gram panchayat. On August 16, Ganga merged with Pagla and on September 4, it ate up Ganga Bhavan. Now the gram panchayat of KB Jhaubona does not even exist. Part of north Panchanandapur has been wiped out of existence.

"All out efforts are on to restrict water from flowing

to the low-lying areas of the bibek taking the course of Pagla," the BDO said in his report to the DM. "Real-time erosion is yet to begin. What we see now is mere flood. Erosion will begin once the water begins to recede," said Kaliachak-II sabbapati Dipti Kumar Chakraborty.

Senior Farakka barrage officials spell doom once Ganga and Pagla finally merge. What is needed is a master

plan and huge funds to keep Ganga tied to its original course. The Centre has to realise the impending danger and act in haste, they say.

Murshidabad is not out of danger either. At Sankopara and Nayansukh in Farakka, erosion is wreaking havoc. The gushing Ganga is now barely 250 metres from the railway track linking the north-eastern states with the rest of the country. The

NH-34 is less than two km away and the river is steadily approaching.

"Erecting small embankments will not solve the problem. It will aggravate it. A national disaster is waiting to happen. We are pressing the Centre to release enough funds and undertake permanent remedial measures," said Murshidabad zilla parishad sabbadhipati Siddika Begum.

নদী-সংযোগকে সাহায্য নয়, বিশ্বব্যাঙ্কে আর্জি ঢাকার

২৩ সেপ্টেম্বর - ঢাকা ২৪/৯/০১
রহমান জাহাঙ্গির

২৩ সেপ্টেম্বর: ভারতের প্রস্তাবিত নদী-সংযোগ প্রকল্পকে সাহায্য না করার জন্য বিশ্বব্যাঙ্কে অনুরোধ জানিয়েছে বাংলাদেশ। বিশ্বব্যাঙ্কের কান্ট্রি ডিরেক্টর ক্রিস্টিন ওয়ালিখ বাংলাদেশের জলসম্পদ মন্ত্রী হাফিজউদ্দিন আহমেদের সঙ্গে দেখা করলে তিনি তাঁকে এই আর্জি জানান। আহমেদ বলেন, “ব্রহ্মপুত্রের জল যদি নদী-সংযোগের মাধ্যমে ভারতের ভিতরেই টেনে নেওয়া হয়, তবে বাংলাদেশের কৃষির ভয়ানক ক্ষতি হবে। দেশের বিস্তীর্ণ অঞ্চল মরুভূমিতে পরিণত হবে।” ওয়ালিখ এ ব্যাপারে তাঁর সহমত জানিয়ে বিষয়টি পশ্চিমবঙ্গের সংশ্লিষ্ট কর্তৃপক্ষের নজরে আনবেন বলে আশ্বাস দেন।

ও দিকে, বাংলাদেশের নদী-বিশেষজ্ঞেরা ভারতের এই ‘মারণ’ পরিকল্পনার বিশদ তথ্য জোগাড় করে তার বিরুদ্ধে প্রতিবাদ গড়ে তোলার আহ্বান জানিয়েছেন। অধ্যাপক আইনান নিশাত সাংবাদিকদের বলেন, “নিজের খরা-প্রবণ এলাকাগুলিকে বাঁচানোর জন্য ভারত অনেকদিনই জল টেনে নেওয়ার কথা ভাবছে। আমরা যথেষ্ট তথ্য পাচ্ছি না বলেই উপযুক্ত প্রতিবাদ কর্মসূচী গড়ে তুলতে পারছি না।” উল্লেখ করা যেতে পারে, গঙ্গা, ব্রহ্মপুত্র, তিস্তা ও অন্য কয়েকটি নদী থেকে প্রায় ২০০-২৫০ শতকোটি কিউসেক জল নিয়ে উত্তরপ্রদেশ, মধ্যপ্রদেশ, হরিয়ানা, মহারাষ্ট্র, রাজস্থান ও গুজরাতে সরবরাহ করার ভেবেছে ভারত। ১২ বছর পরে দিল্লিতে আগামী সপ্তাহে ‘জয়েন্ট রিভার কমিশন’র যে বৈঠক হওয়ার কথা, সেখানে সরকারি ভাবে ভারতের এই পরিকল্পনা সম্পর্কে বিস্তারিত জানতে চাওয়া উচিত বলে নিশাত মত প্রকাশ করেন।

আখতার হোসেন উল্লেখ করেন, যে ভাবে ১১২-২০০ শতকোটি ডলারের এই পরিকল্পনা বাস্তবায়িত করার জন্য অনাবাসী ভারতীয়রা সাহায্য করছেন বা সুপ্রিম কোর্ট এর দ্রুত রূপায়ণের জন্য সুপারিশ করেছে, তা থেকে বোঝা যাচ্ছে ভারত বিষয়টি নিয়ে যথেষ্ট ব্যগ্র। সুতরাং বাংলাদেশের পরিবেশ, অর্থনীতি, জনস্বাস্থ্য ও জীবনযাত্রার উপরে তার বিধ্বংসী প্রভাবের দিকটি তুলে ধরে জাতীয় ও আন্তর্জাতিক স্তরে জনমত গঠন করা দরকার।

আখতার হোসেন - ২০

24 SEP 2003

The Kyoto protocol's pledge to pollute the environment to a lesser extent than other countries means falling behind in terms of economic growth

COSTS OF KYOTO

By VYACHESLAV NIKONOV

Environment ST. 8

It's an open secret that human progress tends to impair environmental efficiency. However, scientists have failed to prove that the greenhouse effect is bad for this planet's climate. I know quite a few serious books and other publications whose authors claim that this factor has nothing to do with global warming. Planet Earth has experienced numerous warming periods as well as global and local ice ages.

All this happened long before mankind started polluting the environment. Global temperatures rose by one degree Centigrade in the early 20th century, that is, when any substantial carbon-dioxide emissions were nowhere to be seen.

Secondly, mankind faces no less important problems requiring economic growth. As I see it, some other problems considerably influence carbon-dioxide levels, thus requiring serious attention. There are one billion undernourished people all over the world; 1.6 billion people lack electricity; 2.5 billion people use bio-mass as fuel and energy. Forests measuring one football field in area are being destroyed on this planet every four seconds.

Consequently, 22,000 football fields are destroyed the world over every day. We are talking about the need for development and the need to cut carbon-

The author is Director of the Politika Foundation in Russia

dioxide emissions at the same time. Still this can be accomplished with the help of other measures rather than through the Kyoto protocol alone.

Thirdly, there is the political aspect of this problem. Russia now voices a moral stand on the issue, fulfilling and even over-fulfilling the Kyoto protocol's requirements.

Unfortunately, a nationwide recession set in throughout the 1990s, thereby making it possible to slash carbon-dioxide

Fourthly, the United States, which is the main prospective quota buyer, will never rejoin the Kyoto protocol. This is absolutely out of the question under the incumbent Republican Administration. The Democrats are highly unlikely to do this, either. It should be mentioned in this connection that the United States withdrew from the Kyoto protocol under Bill Clinton (Dem.), rather than George Bush Jr. (Rep).

And now a few words about

The EU, which wants Russia to ratify the Kyoto protocol, should offer something in return



emissions by an unprecedented margin. Incidentally, no other country will ever manage to do the same. Therefore, any reproaches to the effect that Russia doesn't abide by the Kyoto protocol are absolutely groundless. So, what did Russia get in return? They are promising that Russia will be able to sell its own quotas some time in the future.

Europe. There exist pretty slim chances for receiving something from the European Union. The EU established its quota market without asking Russia's advice.

Besides, the EU still refused to consider Russian carbon-dioxide emission cuts in the 1990s. Consequently, our future cuts will be heeded. The EU is the Russian Federation's toughest

est and most intractable negotiating partner. We failed to obtain any concessions on the Kaliningrad problem and on our projected World Trade Organisation membership. The same is true of visa-free exchanges and anti-dumping investigations. The EU, which wants us to ratify the Kyoto protocol, should offer something to Russia in return.

Can we estimate possible Russian financial benefits from quota sales? Some people believe that Russia might earn a fantastic sum of \$50 billion. However, the relevant market doesn't exist.

Meanwhile, lack of a quota market rules out any prices whatsoever. So, why should we ratify the Kyoto protocol? It's impossible to sell any product, whose price is unknown. Mind you, normal sellers don't act that way.

The Russian economy faces extremely serious problems at this stage. However, the Kyoto protocol's ratification essentially signifies Russia's refusal to set ambitious tasks for the sake of a serious economic breakthrough.

A pledge to pollute the environment to a much lesser extent than numerous other countries, including the United States, means that Russia will continue to fall behind in terms of its economic development levels. It, therefore, turns out that we can simply sell our future economic growth for an unspecified price.

THE STATESMAN

21 SEP 2003

Blame game echoes in Taj corridor

DALIP SINGH

New Delhi, Sept. 18: Former Uttar Pradesh chief secretary D.S. Bagga tried to shift the entire blame for the controversial Taj heritage corridor project on former state principal secretary (environment) R.K. Sharma when CBI sleuths questioned him early last month.

Admitting to the officials that "gross procedural irregularities" took place, Bagga distanced himself from the anomalies during his tenure. He was shunted out after the recent change of guard in Uttar Pradesh.

Bagga was also chairman of the Mission Management Board (MMB) set up on the directives of the Supreme Court to protect the

environment around Taj Mahal. The Rs 175-crore corridor project aimed at developing a heritage zone encompassing Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Rambagh, Itmad-ud-Daula and Chini-ka-Roja. It would have been part of a green belt along the Yamuna.

On April 6, 2002, Bagga decided in consultation with then chief minister Mayavati that the Union Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs' approval was mandatory for releasing funds and beginning any heritage protection scheme.

Bagga told the CBI that Mayavati cleared the proposal, but did not give the go-ahead for construction — a claim investigators are taking with a pinch of salt as the Taj project was among the

six priority projects approved by the MMB on August 4 last year.

The former chief secretary said the National Project Construction Corporation (NPCC) was only told to prepare a detailed project report and not to commence work, which was stopped after the Supreme Court intervened. But he failed to clarify why the state had given Rs 17 crore of the Rs 175-crore project to NPCC. At this point, he tried to pass the buck to Sharma, who was suspended over the controversy.

Bagga claimed Sharma wrote to the Centre on November 16 last year, seeking the cabinet committee's approval for the project. CBI documents showed Bagga claiming: "Surprisingly, he has mentioned in the said letter that

the DPRs (detailed project reports) of all the schemes are attached and that the same had already been approved in the meeting (of the MMB) held on 12th October, 2002, which is apparently false."

When the CBI asked how Sharma could release Rs 17 crore on his own, Bagga said the file on funds for the project never came to him. But he claimed: "In the file on which Rs 17 crore were released, there is no mention of higher orders except the minutes of the meeting of Mission Management Board which have been, as explained above, fraudulently recorded and mischievously misconstrued."

The CBI has said Rs 17 crore was given to NPCC before formal orders were issued to start work.

It has found that officials had sanctioned another Rs 20 crore on May 21 this year, but the money did not reach the construction company as officials were alerted after the scandal was exposed.

Bagga said he had strongly objected to the release of funds and start of work in a noting on the project file. On the contrary, the environment department had noted that all formalities had been completed and even the cabinet committee had released some money which, he again claimed, was not true.

Asked why he did not stop the illegal work at the project site, Bagga said that would have resulted in the wastage of crores of rupees. He blamed Sharma for getting the work started.

When the CBI asked how the NPCC could be awarded the contract without floating tenders, Bagga said the corporation was asked to prepare a project report by the environment department.

Interestingly, four days after a report on June 15 this year that work had been started without statutory approval, Bagga wrote to cabinet secretariat additional secretary R. Poornalingam, saying they had issued a denial. He also wrote that "as per department's (environment) version, nothing is being done in connection with Taj Protection Mission Project at Agra near Taj Mahal which in any way may be construed to be in contravention of either the orders of court or guidelines of Government of India".

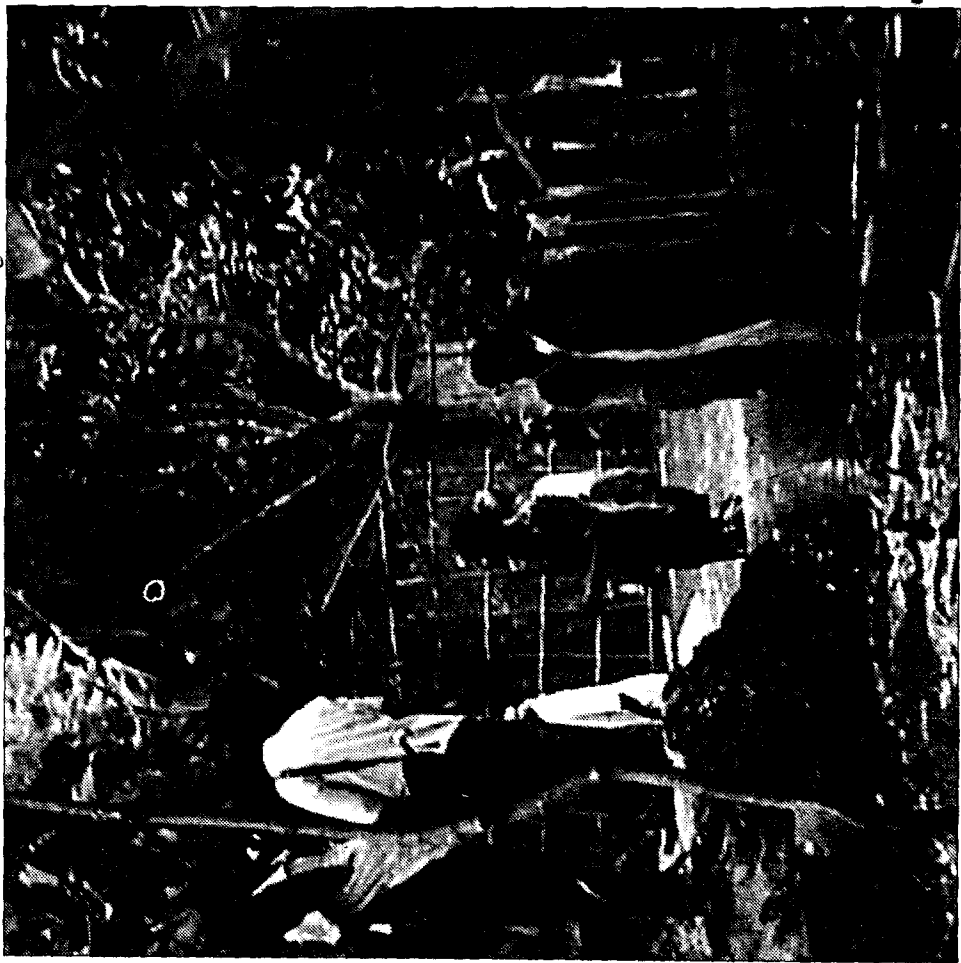
CORRIDOR CAPER

• **The project:** Spend Rs 175 crore and fill a 2-km stretch of the Yamuna bed between the Agra Fort and the Taj Mahal. Build a "heritage corridor" on the reclaimed land, complete with shopping malls, parks and restaurants

• **The problem:** Work started in October 2002. But in June 2003, it was revealed that the project had not received statutory clearances from the Centre and environment protection agencies. The Centre ordered the work to be stopped after realising that the project violated the Archaeological Survey of India Act and the Supreme Court's guidelines to protect the Taj

Malda floods worsen, red alert sounded

SF 8 189
 Statesman News Service



Men try to put up a bund at Sakullapur, Kaliachak II, on Wednesday. — The Statesman

MALDA. Sept. 17. — The situation in Malda took a turn for the worse today with the flood affecting several southern and northern parts of the district.

Reports sent by the Malda DM today to Writers' say 20,590 families have been affected due to the flood which have till now inundated 123 villages.

Though the Ganga flowed steadily for a few hours in the southern parts yesterday, the water level was on the rise again today. The administrations sounded a red alert today in the protected banks of the Fulohar river after it crossed the danger mark of 28.30 metre. The "back flow" of the Padma waters in Bangladesh has caused huge volumes of water to gush into the confluence of the rivers Pagla and Bhagirathi at Mahadipur near Gour in English Bazaar. Several villages along the Indo-Bangla border have been inundated in Kaliachak I, Kaliachak III, and English Bazar. The waters of the Mahananda have started a "back flow" since yesterday in English Bazar. Patrolling along the Indo-Bangla border is likely to be affected, the BSF has said. District authorities have asked the English Bazaar BDO to monitor the situation.

The Malda DM informed the relief department principal secretary today that an embankment at Gholamari point in Katihar, Bihar, has breached and water is rushing in to the Mahananda and Fulohar taking the water level of the Fulohar above the danger level. Also, floodwaters from Bihar have af-

ected several families in Harishchandrapur, Ratua, and Chanchal in the northern parts.

Restoration work of a five-vented sluice gate at Tejlana in Harishchandrapur has started. Two days ago a gate collapsed due to the water pressure of the Fulohar river and the Par-Valuka village was marooned along with more than 800 people. The DM has asked the BDO to allot funds from any of the rural schemes like Swarnajayanti Gram Rojgar Yojana for any relief related work. The executive engineer, Mahananda embankment division, said: "In the name of repairing the sluice gates some criminals have damaged the gates. Earlier when we visited the spot along with the superintending engineer, the villagers did not agree to repair the damaged gate. A sub-assistant engineer has been sent today to oversee the matter."

The Malda irrigation division has said that over 22 lakh cusec of water is being released by the Ganga in Malda. The Farakka Barrage Project has been forced to open almost all the gates, and nearly 14 lakh cusec of water is being released towards Bangladesh. According to the irrigation officials, though the water level has been falling in Buxer, Dighaghaat, Gandhighaata, and Hatida, it is constant in Munger and Bhagalpur, following which there has been a rise in the water level in Kailachak II, Manikchakhaat, and Farakka.

At Manikchakhaat the water level is 26.15 metres, 85 cm above the danger level, at 3 p.m. today. The Ganga irrigation division officials say till 26.30 metres the spillage can be checked at Sakurullahapur and Jorekosturi in Kaliachak II by dumping plastic sand bags.

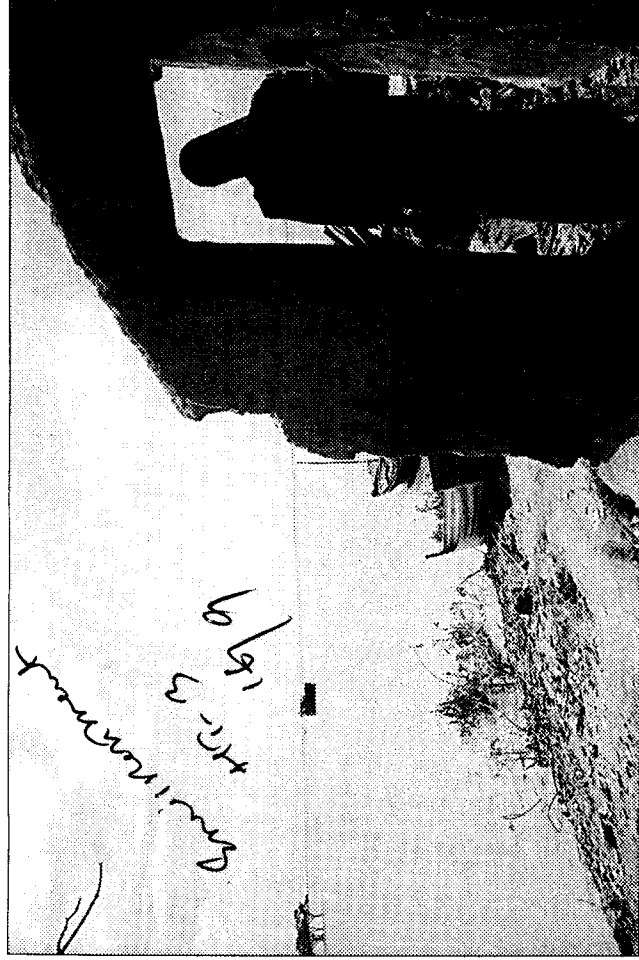
Buddha blames Centre for erosion

HT Correspondent & PTI
Malda, September 15

BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE on Monday blamed the Centre for the failure to tackle erosion as fresh complaints of slack relief poured in from thousands of residents stranded on a remote island in Manikchak, Malda.

The Centre's delay in approving the state's anti-erosion master plan for Malda and Murshidabad had made it difficult for the government to launch measures to tackle the problem, the chief minister said. "The problem of erosion cannot be tackled by the state alone. The Centre has not yet accepted the anti-erosion master plan prepared by us. I have discussed the matter with the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister. They had sent water resources minister Arjun Shetty to assess the situation in the affected district. But nothing has been done. Erosion in the district is a national issue," Bhattacharjee said.

Bhattacharjee, who visited Murshidabad on Sunday,



SAD RUINS: A woman looks out to the Ganga from the door of what once was her home in Panchanandapur, Malda, on Monday.

said 29,000 people had been affected in the floods in Farakka and Bhagabangola in the district of which nearly 500 families had been shifted to safer places. He said the Ganga is flowing towards Murshidabad and posing a threat to the National Thermal Power Corporation and Farakka barrage.

"The next two days are

been sent to the affected areas, he said adding that the Ramakrishna Mission, CARE and some other organisations had joined the government in the services.

His claims, however, rang hollow as victims in Malda continued to brave the floods without food or water. More than 2,500 residents have been stranded on Gadaichar island in Manikchak block for the past 15 days. Just two-and-a-half hours by boat from Manikchak, Gadaichar was among the first areas to be flooded. Manikchak MLA Asima Choudhury denied the allegations but said the relief reaching the island might not be adequate.

The outcry came two days after complaints of more than 200 people stranded in Gidarmari Char in Jharkhand reached relief minister Hafiz Alam Sairani.

The backflow of the Padma, meanwhile, flooded Panchanandapur, Sovanagar, Kumbhira and Bakrabad, leaving more than 30,000 homeless. The BDO admitted shortage of relief. Villagers had ferry to the block office to collect relief material.

ASHOK NATH DEY/HT

crucial. We are keeping a watch on the situation," the chief minister said after a meeting with home secretary A.K. Deb earlier in the day. Adequate relief had

More Malda areas under flood waters

Statesman News Service

MALDA/KOLKATA, Sept. 15. — "The Ganga and the Fulohar rivers have inundated fresh areas in the unprotected zone of six blocks in the district after a further rise in water level," the Malda district magistrate, Mr AK Bala, informed the state government today.

Since yesterday, a fresh area of the Kalichak III block has been inundated by floodwaters from Bangladesh through Mora-Ganga. According to the officials, floodwaters are entering into Bangladesh from Farakka and flowing down to the Golapganj areas in this block. In the unprotected zone, the two rivers have submerged 23 gram panchayats. In all 1,430 of the 8,000 families in the area have been rendered homeless by floods and erosion.

The administration today faced law and order problem during distribution of tarpaulin sheets among flood victims when the CPI-M gram panchayat members refused to accept the beneficiary list prepared by the Congress gram panchayat pradhan of Manikchak.

While the Ganga water in Malda has touched the danger mark, the state government is hopeful that the situation won't worsen any further. In Murshidabad too flood water has, as per government figures, washed away about 750 houses and partially damaged another 1000-odd, affecting around 55,000 people. Government representatives, however, said the situation was "not alarming".

The chief minister Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, while stating the bad part of the story, said: "Flood waters have swept Farak-

ka in Malda to Bhagabangola in Murshidabad. Erosion caused by the rivers is an additional cause of concern in the region. The river water level at Malda has reached 26 metres today — the optimum level which our present infrastructure can withstand. Yesterday it was 25.92 metres."

"The level of water at the upper catchments is receding steadily. Relief materials have already reached the affected. The Ramakrishna Mission volunteers have already started with their relief work. Officials of Care and Unicef will reach today," he stated as the good side of the story.

Mr Srikumar Mukherjee, state civil defence minister who recently visited the flood affected regions alongside his counterpart from the relief department, Mr Hafiz Alam Sairani, also briefed reporters at Writers'

Buildings today. "In Malda, the affected area comprises six blocks covering 23 Gram Panchayats. The total inundated area is 68.3 square km covering 85 villages. The three worst hit regions are Bhutnir Char, Ratua and Harishchandrapur. The present situation is, however, better as the water level at Allahabad is fast receding and the area hasn't received heavy rainfall recently." "Our major cause of concern was to prevent waters of the rivers Ganga and Pagla from merging at the lowlying area in Sakalyapur. That we have managed successfully by means of sandbag boundaries," the minister said.

"We'll hold a meeting with the non-government funding agencies at the Unicef office on 17 September. We have already identified alternative cultivable lands for affected villagers and will talk to the NGOs on

the possibility of building a colony for rehabilitating the homeless," he added.

On the plight of the flood affected regions in Murshidabad, Mr Mukherjee said: "Bhagabangola I, II and Maheshpur are the three most inundated blocks. Although the water level is on the rise there, the situation is not alarming."

Referring to the proposed master plan to prevent erosion caused by the Ganges and Padma, the chief minister said: "This is a national issue and not just of this state. Despite my repeated intimations to the Prime Minister and the deputy Prime Minister, the Centre is yet to formally approve of this Rs 900-crore project. Two Central government projects, the Farakka Barrage and the NTPC power plant, are among those that are being seriously affected by the erosion."

Cancer scare in mosquito coils

MONOBINA GUPTA

New Delhi, Sept. 14: A recent study by US scientists warns that mosquito coils emit smoke that could cause cancer among people exposed to the fumes for a long period.

The research, conducted by the University of California and published in the journal of environmental health perspectives, was based on a study of 50 samples of coils. The samples contained S-2 or Octachlorodipropyl, banned for sale in the US.

"It is possible the coils are exposing the users to Bischloromethyl Ether, also known as BCME, a potent lung carcino-

gen. The exposure could be high if the coils are used overnight, as they often are," the study underlines.

"We do not know if mosquito coils cause cancer but we do know they can cause a lot of health hazards, the most primary being breathing difficulty, particularly for people with asthma," said Dr B.K. Sharma, a general physician in Delhi.

In India, two million people are afflicted by malaria every year. Apart from malaria, mosquitoes are carriers of killer diseases like encephalitis and dengue.

Scores of people died of Japanese Encephalitis in Andhra Pradesh recently.

It is, therefore, virtually impossible for people not to use one or another mosquito repellent. More so, because the surroundings often have stagnant water or open drains that are breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

What is of concern is that it is not mosquito coils alone that are harmful to health — researches both in India and abroad have shown that almost all mosquito repellents have hazardous side-effects.

A study by the Indian Academy of Sciences, a part of the Indian Council for Medical Research, shows that almost all repellents use synthetic pyrethroids, that is, Diethyl Tolu-

veloped asthma after using mosquito repellents.

Researchers said the side-effects might not appear immediately, but do surface over time. Doctors recommend safe alternatives like mosquito nets, neem cream made of neem oil and coconut or mustard oil.

Kochi in Kerala, where the problem is endemic, has carried out an experiment to kill mosquitoes when they are at the larvae stage.

The Kochi corporation increased the salinity of water in canals and stagnant pools — major breeding grounds. The experiment was successful as it killed the larvae in the breeding ground itself.

imide. The market for mosquito repellents — coils, mats, lotions and vaporisers — growing annually at 7 to 10 per cent, is about Rs 500-600 crore.

Earlier, the Malaria Research Centre had carried out a survey in nine states and revealed that "mosquito repellents widely used in the country are harmful to health".

The result of the survey revealed that 11.8 per cent users of Diethyl Toluimide, cutting across all age groups, complained of toxic effects.

The most common complaint was breathing difficulty, followed by irritation in the eye, headache and skin reaction. Two persons said they de-

Vajpayee to consult CMs over CRA meeting

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, Sept. 13. ^{13/9}
The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, will consult the chief ministers of the Cauvery Basin states to convene a meeting of the Cauvery River Authority, of which he is the chairman, in view of the crisis in the Cauvery delta districts in Tamil Nadu.

The DMK president, Mr M Karunanidhi, disclosed to reporters outside the Apollo Hospital here today that the Prime Minister's response followed his appeal made to him during their meeting at the hospital highlighting the plight of the Cauvery delta farmers in Tamil Nadu.

Only a few days back, the various farmers' associations and political activists had organised a hartal and agitation in the three Cauvery delta districts of Tiruvarur, Thanjavur and Nagapattinam, to press the state government to impress on the Centre to convene a meeting of the Cauvery River Authority. The Prime Minister told him he would convene the CRA meeting "as soon as possible after consulting the chief ministers concerned," Mr Karunanidhi said.

The Prime Minister, who was accompanied by a few Union ministers from Tamil Nadu, state BJP leaders and family members of Mr Maran, spent about 30 minutes at the Apollo Hospital where he arrived at 1.15 p.m. to enquire about his Union minister, Mr Murasoli Maran, undergoing intensive treatment for multiple organ failure. Mr Karunanidhi said that Mr Maran responded when the Prime Minister called out his name.

Mr Vajpayee is on a day's visit to Chennai to take part in the inaugural function of The Hindu's 125th anniversary this evening.

14 SEP 2003

THE STATESMAN

কার স্বার্থে নদী জুড়ে দেওয়ার চর্চা

কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার উঠে পড়ে

লোগেছেন, দেশের বড় বড়

নদীগুলি জুড়ে দেনো। প্রকৃতির

বিরুদ্ধে এই অভিযান এক

ভয়াবহ পরিণাম ডেকে আনবে।

লিখছেন সুব্রত সিন্হা

গত ছাব্বিশে অগস্টের আনন্দবাজার পত্রিকায় 'নদী সংযোগ প্রকল্প নিয়ে বৃদ্ধ-প্রভুর কথা' শীর্ষক সংবাদটিতে টাঙ্গ ফোর্স-এর চেয়ারম্যান সুরেশ প্রভুর উদ্ধৃত জবানবিত্তে

বলা হয়েছে যে দেশের বড় বড় নদীগুলি জুড়ে দেওয়া হলে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের উপকার হবে এবং কলকাতা বন্দরের নাব্যতা বাড়বে। আমাদের মধ্যমস্রী ও এই ব্যাপারে সব রকম সাহায্যের আশ্বাস দিয়েছেন। যাঁরা ওই প্রকল্প সম্বন্ধে কিছুটা ওয়াকিবহাল তাঁরা এই খবরটি পড়ে সত্যিই আতঙ্কিত হবেন। সবচেয়ে আশ্চর্যের ব্যাপার যে বৃদ্ধদের ভট্টাচার্যের মতো বিচক্ষণ ও চিন্তাশীল ব্যক্তি কী করে এতে সাহায্য দিলেন!

লক্ষণীয়, এই ব্যাপারে পূর্বাঞ্চলের রাজ্যগুলির মধ্যে অসম, বিহার ও মিকিম যৌর আপত্তি তুলেছে। তা ছাড়া প্রতিবেশী বাংলাদেশ তো আন্তর্জাতিক স্তরেও প্রতিবাদ করেছে। মনে রাখতে হবে, দুই দেশের নদীবর্তন চুক্তি অলঙ্ঘনীয়। এই পরিবেশকেই বোঝা দরকার, এই প্রকল্প রূপায়িত হলে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের কী বিপর্যয় হবে।

নদী-সংযোগের রূপরেখাটি বহু বছর আগে কে এল রাণ্ডয়ের কারিগরি চিন্তাভাবনা-উদ্ভূত একটি খসড়া। আগেও কয়েক বার এ রকম প্রকল্প করার চেষ্টা হয়েছে, তার সবগুলিই বাতিল করা হয়েছে। তবে এ বারের প্রকল্পের আকৃতি-প্রকৃতি ও আভিসন্ধি একেবারে অন্য ধাঁচের।

গত বছরের স্বাধীনতা দিবসে মহামান্য রাষ্ট্রপতি তাঁর নদী-শৃঙ্খল করার ষষ্ঠ জনসমক্ষে প্রকাশ করেন। এর ভিত্তিতে আবেদন করায় দেশের উচ্চতম আদালত 'জনস্বার্থ উপযোগী' আখ্যা দিয়ে রাষ্ট্রপতির 'স্বপ্ন সত্ত্ব' করার অনুমতি দেন। অবশ্য আপত্তির

বহুর দেশে আদালত এটাও পরে স্পষ্ট করেছে যে কোনও রীতিনীতি বা নিয়মকানুন লঙ্ঘন করা চলবে না। দুষ্চিন্তার কথা এই, আদালতের নির্দেশ প্রায়শই অগ্রাহ্য করা হয়। এক সি আই ওয়ান্ডা থেকে গরিবদের খাদ্যসামগ্রী দেবার নির্দেশ আজও কার্যকর করা হয়নি। এ ক্ষেত্রেও তা-ই হবে না তো?

প্রধানমন্ত্রী গত বছর ১ এপ্রিল বৃষ্টির জল সংরক্ষণ ও গ্রামে-গ্রামে জল ধরে রাখার আক্যাকতার ওপর জোর দিয়েছেন। 'ন্যাশনাল ওয়াটার পলিসি'র গুরুত্বও তুলে ধরেছেন। তিনিই আবার হুঁমাসের মধ্যে সম্পূর্ণ বিপরীতধর্মী নদী-সংযোগ প্রকল্পটি অনুমোদন করেছেন। সমস্ত ব্যাপারটাই যেন সেই 'হৃদয়ঙ্গর রাজার গবুচন্দ্র মন্ত্রী'র গল্পের মতো। লক্ষণীয়, এর পিছনে আবার প্রায় সমস্ত বড় রাজনৈতিক দলের সাহায্য রয়েছে। নির্বাচন এবং প্রচুর অর্থসামগ্য সংক্রান্ত রাজনৈতিক উদ্দেশ্যও হয়তো এর পিছনে আছে।

পরিবেশসভেতন ও অভিজ্ঞ বহু মানুষ, পত্রপত্রিকায়, সভাসমিতিতে, ইন্টারনেটে, এমনকী প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দরবারে পর্যন্ত অনেক যুক্তি দেখিয়ে এই প্রকল্পের বিরোধিতা করেছেন। পরিবেশ সংক্রান্ত অনেক ওজর আপত্তি তুলেছে স্বয়ং কেন্দ্রীয় পরিবেশ দফতর। 'প্রভুজি'র আশ্বাস এ সব নাকি যতিয়ে দেখা হবে। আমাদের অভিজ্ঞতা অন্য রকম। আপত্তিগুলিকে সাধারণ বুদ্ধি ও ভৌগোলিক জ্ঞানের ভিত্তিতে বিচার করলে সারমর্ম এই দাঁজয় যে এই প্রকল্পটি রূপায়িত হলে দেশের জলমাত্রির ভারসাম্য সম্পূর্ণ বিপর্যস্ত হবে। ইতিহাসকে বিকৃত করা চলে, কিন্তু প্রকৃতিক বাস্তবতার অবহেলা করলে তার খোঁসারত প্রকৃতি আদায় করে ছাড়বে। সরাসরি প্রকৃতির বিরোধিতায় নামলে সেভাঁজ্জেস-এর দন কিহোতে ও সাব্বো পানসার লড়াই করার গল্প মনে করিয়ে দেয়।

তিন মাসের যৌর বর্ষা (মৌসুমী) ও বাকি বছর শুষ্কতা-প্রণব আমাদের এই দেশে নদীগুলি বর্ষাকালীক রুদ্ররূপ ধারণ করে। ভূমিক্ষয়, ভাঙন, ধস, অর্জাধিক পলি পড়া, বন্যা, নদীর নাব্যতা হ্রাস এবং দিক পরিবর্তন আমাদের কাছে নতুন নয়। সব নদীই তার খরা ও জলকৃষ্টিতির চর্কে বাড়ে-কমে। দুটি নদীকে জুড়ে দিলে দুই নদীর সমস্যাই বেড়ে যাবে। যে কেউ বর্ষাকালে গঙ্গা-হুগলি বা ব্রহ্মপুত্রের দুর্দান্ত ভয়াবহ রূপ দেখেছেন, তাঁরাই বুঝবেন এই দুই নদীর সমন্বিত বিপুল জনরাসিকের কোনও প্রকারণ বাহু নিরীহঁথ্যতে পরিচালিত করার প্রচেষ্টা বাতুলতা মাত্র।

আর খরচের বহর! এর কাছে 'খণ্ড' কৃতা যুতং পিবেৎ' দর্শনও হার মানে! তা হলে কাদের স্বার্থে এই উদ্ভট প্রকল্প? একটু যত্নে দেখা দরকার।

দেশের ৩৬টি নদী এবং রাজস্থান কানাল-কে নিয়ে যে রাজসূয় যজ্ঞের কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে তাতে ৩০টি বন্ধনে তৈরি হবে প্রকল্পের নদী-শৃঙ্খল। উত্তর-পূর্বাঞ্চলের ব্রহ্মপুত্র ও গাঙ্গেয় উপত্যকার পূর্বভাগে রয়েছে উদ্ভূত জলের ভাণ্ডার (সরকারি মতে)। তাই এখন থেকেই জলাভাবগ্রস্ত অঞ্চলগুলিতে নদী সংযোগ করে জলরাশি নেওয়া হবে। যাত্রাপথের রেকর্ডিং দেখলেই কিন্তু প্রকৃত উদ্দেশ্য ধরা পড়ে।

১) দক্ষিণ দিকে ১৬টি সংযোগ (link)— শোন, দামোদর, সুবর্ণরেখা, মহানদীর গতিপথে প্রধানত কর্ণাটক, তামিলনাড়ু ও অন্ধ্র প্রদেশে জল।

২) উত্তর দিকে ৪টি সংযোগ— কোশি, গভক, যবগুড়া, মেই ও যমুনার নদীপথে হারিয়ানা এবং দিল্লির চারপাশের অঞ্চল জনসিক্ত করবে।

৩) পশ্চিম দিকে ৭টি সংযোগ মূলত গুজরাতের জল নেওয়ার জন্য হয়েছে। এই যাত্রাপথে রাজস্থান, মহারাষ্ট্র এবং মধ্যপ্রদেশে কিছুটা জল পাবে।

৪) পূর্ব দিকে ব্রহ্মপুত্র ও গঙ্গাকে যুক্ত করার পথে ফরাক্কী থেকে মুম্বরবরের সংযোগ— জলক্ষীত

এই সর্বনাশা প্রকল্প

পশ্চিমবঙ্গে আরও উদ্ভূত জল ঢালা হবে। উপরের চিত্র থেকে স্পষ্ট হয়ে যায় যে, সমস্ত প্রকল্পটি বিশেষ করে কটি রাজ্যাঞ্চলের সুবিধার্থে করা হয়েছে। যে নামেই হোক দিল্লির আশপাশে গড়ে উঠেছে নতুন শিল্পাঞ্চল (ন্যাশনাল কাপিস্টাল রিজন)। গুজরাত, কর্ণাটক, তামিলনাড়ু, অন্ধ্র ও কিছুটা মহারাষ্ট্র ও মধ্যপ্রদেশে— এ সব রাজ্যে অনেক বিশাল ও বহুজাতিক শিল্প ও বাণিজ্যিক সংস্থা শিকড় গেড়েছে।

অথচ প্রকৃতি বিমুখ। ভূতাত্ত্বিক পরিহিতি, ভৌগোলিক কাঠামো অথবা কম বর্ষাজনিত শুষ্কতার ফলে এ সব অঞ্চলে জল সংরক্ষণের ক্ষমতা অনেক কম। কিন্তু শিল্পায়ন ও তার অবিচ্ছিন্ন সঙ্গী নগরায়ণ— সর্বদাই জলতৃষ্ণায় জর্জরিত। এ ছাড়া কৃষিক্ষেত্রেও আখ ও বিদেশি উচ্চফলশীল গম এবং ধানের জন্য প্রভূত পরিমাণে জলের প্রয়োজন। এ সব চাহবাস করে রাজনৈতিক প্রভাবশালী অতিবহু চাষিগোষ্ঠী। এরা বিশাল পরিমাণে সরকারি অনুদানে রাসায়নিক সার ও কীটনাশকের ওষুধ পেয়ে থাকেন। কিন্তু চাষ সার জল ছাড়া হবে না। কাজেই মেকের বরফ গলিয়ে না হোক, দেশের সুদুরতম প্রান্ত থেকে হলেও জল আনতেই হবে।

এখানে বলা প্রয়োজন যে এই ধরনের কৃষিব্যবস্থায় প্রচুর জমি চিরাদিনের মতো অকেজো হয়ে পড়ছে। নর্মদা, উকাই, মাছি, চষল, রাজস্থান কানাল তার অকাটা প্রমাণ। পানীয় জলের মধ্যে কীটনাশকের অবস্থিতের মতো ভয়ানক ঘটনাও এই 'সবুজ বিপ্লব'-এর অবশ্যস্তারী পরিণাম। এই প্রকল্প রূপায়িত হলে এই ধরনের সর্বনেশে কৃষিপদ্ধতিকে আরও প্রসার দেওয়া হবে।

এ বার পশ্চিমবঙ্গের কখাটা একটু ভাবা যাক। একেই তো ফরাক্কী ব্যারাজের ধাক্কায় এই রাজ্য আজও বিপর্যস্ত। কলকাতা বন্দর নাব্যতার অভাবে এখন প্রায় অকেজো। আবার ফরাক্কীর জন্য মালদহ-মুর্শিদাবাদে অনেক নদীপথ উন্মুক্তপাঠে যাচ্ছে। ভূমিক্ষয় ও তজ্জনিত জনবসতি বিনুষ্টি আজও ঘটে চলেছে। এ বছর মালদহ জেলাতেও তার ভয়াবহ স্বাক্ষর পাওয়া যাচ্ছে।

এর উপর যদি নদীপথে ব্রহ্মপুত্রের বর্ষাকালীন উদ্ভূত জল ফরাক্কী থেকে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের উপর দিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়া হয়, তা হলে জলক্ষীত এ রাজ্যের কী দুর্গতি হবে তা সহজেই অনুমেয়। তা ছাড়া, সারা

বিশ্বের উষ্ণতা বৃদ্ধির কারণে সমুদ্রের জলস্তর এমনিতেই বেড়ে যাওয়া সম্ভব, এবং সেটা ঘটবে অদূর ভবিষ্যতে।

একে তো তিনটা প্রকল্পের সর্বনেশে পরিণামের আশঙ্কায় উত্তরবঙ্গ আতঙ্কিত হয়ে আছে। নদী-শৃঙ্খল প্রকল্পের প্রধান গঙ্গা-ব্রহ্মপুত্র সংযোগ যদি এই অঞ্চলের উপর দিয়ে উপর দিয়ে নেওয়া হয় তা হলে প্রাকৃতিক সমতার সমৃদ্ধ হিমালয় পাদদেশের এই বিশ্ববিশ্রুত সৌন্দর্যময় উপত্যকার কিছুই অবশিষ্ট থাকবে না।

নদীশৃঙ্খল প্রকল্প হতখন করে দেবে উত্তরবঙ্গের ডুর্যাস ও অভয়াবরণগুলি। মালদহ বা মুর্শিদাবাদ জেলায় প্রতি বছর বন্যা ও ভাঙনে ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত মানুষের পুনর্বাসন প্রকল্প করার জন্য কোনও বড় পরিকল্পনা আজও করা যায়নি। প্রকৃতির সঙ্গে লড়াই না করে, প্রকৃতির নিয়ম মেনে দীর্ঘমেয়াদি কোনও বড় মাপের ব্যবস্থা আজও নেওয়া হয়নি। অন্য দিকে, দেশের কিছু কিছু অংশে অত্যাধিক জলসেচ ও রাসায়নিক সারের অবাধ ব্যবহার দ্বারা, 'হাইব্রিড' ফসলের মারফত লক্ষ লক্ষ টাকা ঘরে তুলছে চাষিগোষ্ঠী। salinisation (লবণাক্ত করা) ও alkalisiation (অত্যাধিক ক্ষারযুক্ত করা) করে তিলে তিলে জমির উর্বরতা শেষ করে দিচ্ছে। এর সঙ্গেই যুক্ত হয়েছে নিদারুণ জননিষ্কাশন সমস্যা।

এই সঙ্গে এটাও মনে রাখতে হবে যে যত অপূরণীয় ক্ষতিই দেশের হোক না কেন, তার এতটুকু শোশারত তো এই সব বিশাল শিল্পসংস্থা বা অতিবহু চাষিগোষ্ঠীকে দিতে হবে না।

ঋণজর্জরিত আমাদের এই দেশে দারিদ্র, অস্বাস্থ্য, আর্থসামাজিক দুর্গতি ও চরম অশিক্ষার শিকার কোটি-কোটি মানুষ। নদীশৃঙ্খল প্রকল্পে যে হাজার কোটি টাকা ধরা হয়েছে খরচ হিসেবে, তার কিছু ভাগ কি এদের জন্য কাজে লাগানো যায় না? এই বিশাল মানবসম্পদকে যদি উন্নততর জীবনের স্তরে তোলা যায়, সৃষ্টিশীলতায় এই প্রাচীনতম সভ্যতার দেশ অনেক দূর এগিয়ে যাবে। বিদেশি রাষ্ট্রের শর্তাধীন হয়ে ভিক্ষুপাত্র হাতে নতজানু হয়ে থাকতে হবে না। কিন্তু বর্তমান ও ভবিষ্যৎ প্রজন্ম কি সময় থাকতে সেটা বুঝতে পারবে?

লেখক ভূতত্ত্ববিদ, জিওলজিক্যাল সার্ভে ইন্ডিয়া-র ভূতত্ত্ব উপমহানিদেপক

Water moves 250 m in five hours, 450 families homeless

Ganga gobbles up Bhavan



BEFORE...



...AND AFTER

(Left) A recent picture of the Ganga Bhavan. Villagers (right) remove bricks from the remains on Friday. Pictures by Surajit Roy

DEBARATI AGARWALA

Malda, Sept. 5: The irrigation department's pride, the Ganga Bhavan, was eaten away by the ravenous Ganga that ran through banks last night at Panchandapur, gobbling up more than 450 homes.

A small portion of the building stands out of the water now, the only reminder to the bungalow built in 1975 by then irrigation minister A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury.

The river was in no mood to relent. The boulders that were placed along the bank a year ago to stop the river from cutting in further tumbled into the water every second minute. The erosion continued even as officials and villagers looked on in a daze.

The Ganga has washed away everything, from trees and electric poles to homes. "There is nothing left of the Ganga Bhavan. In just five hours, the river ate

into 250 m of the embankment. The building, which stood on three bighas, is inundated and so is most of the area that was Ganga Bhavan *para*," said block development officer Shantanu Naha, who visited the site at 4 pm.

He added that around 450 to 500 families had been flooded out of their homes.

It was the roar of the river pounding against the bungalow that woke up Rakesh Sheikh, who worked as an errand boy for the guests at the Bhavan, a little after 2 am.

Realising what was about to happen, he woke up Afsar Ali, the night guard, and ran out of the building to alert others.

Outside, the villagers slept, unaware of the devastation.

Around 3.30 am, the local mosque issued a warning over its microphone, asking the villagers to evacuate.

"We ran out and informed the other villagers. There was nothing

else to do. The river had just gone wild and was lashing at the bungalow. We stood for hours along with people who had abandoned their homes and watched the land go down. It was terrible," said Afsar.

"I would have been swept away had it not been for Rakesh who woke me up," he said.

Irrigation department executive engineer Pundarikaksha Roy said he was informed about the Bhavan's collapse at 3 am.

"We knew the bungalow was in danger of being washed away but did not imagine it would be so soon. I have informed the chief engineer about the damage over phone," he said.

That the department officials had apprehended a damage was evident from the fact that bookings for the bungalow had been stopped. Expensive kitchen ware had been removed along with television sets and some of the furniture.

The Bhavan was a luxurious two-storeyed bungalow with eight bedrooms, a spacious dining hall and a living room. Roy pegged the loss at Rs 10 lakh. Some pieces of furniture were lost forever, he added.

Interestingly, the irrigation department had spent Rs 4 crore last year to prevent erosion from reaching the guest house.

A huge quantity of boulders had been laid at strategic spots along the river to prevent it from breaking banks.

In 1975, the bungalow was 4 km from the river and provided a scenic view of the Ganga to visitors from a distance.

"Yesterday, the level of the river had risen to 24.82 m. The level increased by 1.39 m in no time because of heavy rain in the catchment areas in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and the release of over 200,000 cusecs from Indrapuri dam in Bihar," said irrigation engineers.

6 SEP 2003

Distress in Malda

2
2
Rubbing salt into old wounds

The West Bengal government's decision to release Rs 3 crores for rehabilitation of families in Malda affected by erosion of banks of the Padma looks like a public relations exercise to stem resentment rather than an effort to get to the roots of the problem. Steady erosion has left thousands without homes. That the affected people are getting increasingly restless was evident when the finance minister visited Malda on 20 August — only to repeat the promises made over the years and never honoured. Predictably, this has incensed the victims. The government grant is a knee-jerk reaction. The state had sought no less than Rs 1,487 crores from the National Calamity Relief Fund to tide over distress caused by floods in the region. The amount sanctioned does not proceed beyond rubbing salt in the wounds. And now the formalities of identifying and allotting land worth Rs 5,000 to each family will take a long time while victims continue to live in distress.

57.8 279
Distribution of relief in North Bengal has been a source of tension among political parties even within the Left Front. The problem has assumed another dimension after the CPI-M lost control of the Malda Zilla Parishad to the Congress-Trinamul-BJP alliance. Marxists need to recover lost ground. What they didn't bargain for was the fiasco surrounding Asim Dasgupta's visit. The relief minister makes it worse by suggesting that rehabilitation work was not taken up in Malda because similar demands would come from Murshidabad, Cooch Behar and North Dinajpur. This is adding insult to injury. While fair and adequate distribution of relief without political strings attached is of utmost importance, it is equally essential to devise a more permanent scheme to cope with erosion.

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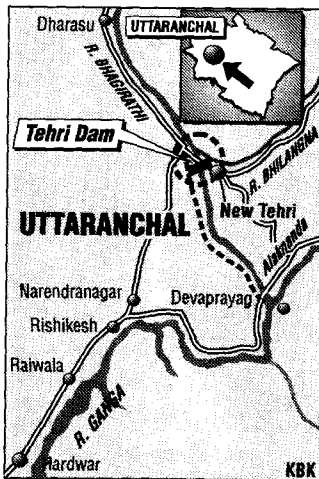
Supreme Court nod for Tehri dam project

By Our Legal Correspondent

*Envi Mem
19.13*

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 1. The Supreme Court today cleared the decks for the construction of the ongoing Tehri hydel dam project in Uttaranchal, holding that there was no material on record to show that statutory environmental conditions had not been complied with.

A three-judge Bench, comprising Justices S. Rajendra Babu, D.M. Dharmadhikari and G.P. Mathur, said by a 2:1 majority that the petitioner, N.D. Jayal, had not established nor placed any material to show that the work was being carried out without complying with the environment norms and guidelines. Justices Babu and Mathur, giving the majority verdict, said the work was



being carried out under the supervision of a monitoring committee.

The Bench, however, made it clear that tunnels number

one and two should not be closed and no further impounding of water should be carried out till the rehabilitation work was completed.

Justice Dharmadhikari, giving the dissenting verdict, said that an expert committee should be set up to carry out all scientific tests, including a 3-D seismic survey, and suggest corrective measures. He also said that the rehabilitation work should be completed. The petitioner had alleged that the construction of such a big project in an active seismic zone had rendered the dam unsafe as no tests regarding safety of the dam from earthquakes, experienced frequently in the region, had been carried out so far.

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2 SEP 2003

Taj file tamper cloud on secretary

Statesman News Service
and Agencies

NEW DELHI, Aug. 31. — The CBI has accused the Union environment and forests secretary, Mr KC Mishra, of tampering files pertaining to the start of work on the controversial Taj Heritage Corridor project.

According to the CBI, Mr Mishra had made "interpolations and tampered with files in order to cover up his failure" to approve the "proposal of the joint secretary and special secretary" that the UP government be asked to proceed with the work only after getting statutory clearances and approvals. The CBI, on the Supreme Court's order, is probing into alleged irregularities in the construction of the Rs 175-crore project.

Efforts to get Mr Mishra's comment on the CBI charge did not succeed because he refused to take calls. The official had reportedly denied having tampered with the files when he was questioned by CBI offi-

cial. The agency is yet to register a specific case against Mr Mishra.

On the Supreme Court's order, the "interpolated and tampered" files had been sent to the Central Forensic Science Laboratory for verification by a handwriting expert.

The CBI is now planning to question former chief minister Miss Mayawati because work on the project started only after her office gave the go-ahead.

The controversy over the project is believed to be one of the factors that triggered the recent political crisis in the state, leading to the change of government.

The Supreme Court ordered the CBI on 16 July to probe the alleged irregularities in the project. The agency was asked to identify the officials and other people who had approved the project without the mandatory environmental and other clearances. The probe brought several top UP and Union government officials under scanner.

On 21 August, the Supreme Court

had directed the CBI to interrogate around five "high and mighty" persons named in the agency's interim report for their alleged complicity in the construction of the project. The agency was asked to probe the assets of these people (incidentally, the UP government had released Rs 17 crore for the project and allegations of kickbacks have been doing the rounds). The CBI was asked to complete the probe "expeditiously" and submit the final report by 11 September.

Taking note of the CBI's charge that files had been "interpolated", the Supreme Court also ordered the Central Forensic Science Laboratory director to conduct a handwriting analysis of the files.

The CBI has questioned former UP environment minister Mr Naseemuddin Siddiqui (considered close to Miss Mayawati), suspended environment secretary Mr RK Sharma, chief secretary Mr DS Bagga, and other senior officials.

Another report on page 4

THE STATESMAN

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Court notice to Centre on water poison

OUR LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

Swaminathan *G.S. Raju*
New Delhi, Aug. 25: The Supreme Court today issued notices to the Centre for framing guidelines to fix standards for drinking water to rid it of pesticides and other harmful chemicals.

The court issued notices to the Union food ministry and the consumer affairs, health and environment ministries on the basis of a petition by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

The CSE, whose findings this month that samples of 12 soft drinks contain very high levels of pesticides caused a furor, said drinking water across India contains similar substances.

In a letter to the Supreme Court, the CSE said potable water samples tested nationwide contained pesticides and sought a direction to the Centre to fix standards for drinking water. A bench of Chief Justice V.N. Khare and Justice S.B. Sinha treated the letter as a petition and issued notices to the Centre today.

On Friday, Trilochan Singh Kathpal, a scientist with the all-India co-ordinated research project of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, had said agricultural scientists have been sitting for years on evidence that India's water is contaminated with pesticides. He said the first signals of the extent of pesticide

residues in groundwater and in irrigation water emerged five years ago and have been supported by subsequent reviews. But scientists have not gone public with the information for fear of causing an explosion of public concern.

Appearing for the CSE, senior counsel Rajeev Dhawan and lawyer Sanjay Parikh today said the Centre had issued a notification fixing standards for bottled water after the institute revealed in February the presence of pesticides in the water. But it said similar guidelines had not been issued for potable water. The CSE counsel said the Centre should fix standards for drinking water "as crores of Indians drink water which is not even potable".

The judges directed additional solicitor-general Mukul Rohtagi to take instructions from the Centre and file an affidavit within four weeks.

The apex court clubbed the CSE petition with a similar plea by Sakshi, an NGO. Sakshi said indiscriminate use of pesticides in agriculture had resulted in contamination of food, milk, groundwater and even breast milk (since vegetables that are consumed contain pesticides). The court has made the Association of Pesticide Manufacturers a party to the case and said both matters should come up for hearing after seven weeks.

NO 'CLEAN CHIT' TO COLA GIANTS: SUSHMA

HDI Pawar heads JPC to probe soft drinks issue 23/8

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 22. Parliament today appointed a 15-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) with the Nationalist Congress Party leader, Sharad Pawar, as chairman, to suggest "suitable safety standards for soft drinks, fruit juice and other beverages" after evaluating the findings of the Centre for Science and Environment on pesticide and other harmful residues in soft drinks.

The JPC has been asked to finalise its report by the first day of the winter session of Parliament.

The 10 members from the Lok Sabha are: Mr. Pawar, Anantha Kumar and Sudha Yadav (BJP), Ramesh Chennithala and Avtar Singh Bhandana (Congress), K. Yerran Naidu (Telugu Desam Party), E. Ahamed (Muslim League), Akhilesh Yadav (Samajwadi Party), Anil Basu (CPI-M) and Ranjit Kumar Panja (Trinamool Congress). The five Rajya Sabha members are Prithviraj Chauhan (Congress), S.S. Ahluwalia (BJP), Sanjay Nirupam (Shiv Sena), Prasanta Chatterjee (CPI-M) and Prem Chand Gupta (Rashtriya Janata Dal). Talking to the media later,

the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, denied that she had given a "clean chit" to the cola giants, Pepsi and Coca-Cola. "If some companies had used her statement in Parliament to advertise their soft drink as safe, that was wrong of them," she added.

"I had only stated what the laboratory findings were and juxtaposed them against the analysis done by the Centre for Science and Environment," she said. "In fact, it was the media which described my statement as a clean chit to the cola giants," Ms. Swaraj added, pointing out that her report was "mixed" with some brands faring better than others.

To a question, she clarified that the "ban" on serving of colas and some other soft drinks in Parliament would continue till the JPC submitted its report and came to a conclusion.

Offer rejected

Ms. Swaraj was more than annoyed that some people had continued to insinuate that money might have changed hands.

It was for this reason that the Government had straightaway offered the

chairmanship of the JPC to the Opposition. She said she had asked the Congress whether the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, would like to chair the JPC, but that was turned down, as was the offer that the Congress deputy leader, Shivraj Patil, chair it.

As against the rules under which the BJP and its allies would have dominated the JPC, the Government had been content to let the Opposition parties have the majority, yet another "proof" of its strict neutrality on this issue.

At the same time, Ms. Swaraj was at pains to point out that she could not take action against the cola giants when their product was within the norms of the country "as of now".

After the JPC report is made available, the Health Ministry would notify new standards for soft drinks, juices and other packed beverages that contain 90 per cent water, she said.

Ms. Swaraj also cautioned against judging everything in India against European Union norms.

"If that is done we will all die of thirst," she said. At the same time she would like to ensure that what was available was safe.

THE HINDU

23 AUG 2003

READY FOR JPC PROBE: SUSHMA

Furore over 'clean chit' to soft drinks firms

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 21. The Government today agreed to set up a Joint Parliamentary Committee to inquire into allegations of high-level of pesticide residues in soft drinks in the wake of demands by the Opposition parties in the Lok Sabha that a JPC be set up to probe the matter.

The demand followed a statement by the Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Sushma Swaraj, in which she said that "the samples of the soft drinks tested were well within the safety limits as per the existing standards of packaged drinking water".

Her statement sparked angry protests with the Opposition parties alleging that the two big soft drinks manufacturers had been given a "clean chit" by the Government. "How much donation was paid before the statement was made," asked Satyavrat Chaturvedi of the Congress.

Charges flew thick and fast as the Minister sought to defend the report sent by the Central Food and Technological Research Institute, Mysore, and the Central Food Laboratory, Kolkata.

The Samajwadi Party's Mulayam Singh Yadav demanded that the Government agree to set up a JPC. He was supported by the Congress, the Telugu Desam Party and the Lokjanshakti Party.

Reacting to the Opposition demand, Ms. Swaraj said the Government had no objection to setting up a JPC. Stung by charges that she might have helped the soft drinks manufacturers, Ms. Swaraj said that as far as she was concerned she had no objection even if the JPC comprised only Opposition members. "Let it be headed by an Opposition member, I have no objection," she said. She challenged Mr. Chaturvedi to name the person who had received the donation and urged the members to refrain from casting aspersions on the CFTRI findings. "It enjoys an international reputation and is not under the control of the Health

Ministry."

Earlier, in her statement to the House, Ms. Swaraj said that the "results clearly showed that all the 12 samples do not have pesticide residues of high order as alleged by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) report and were well within the safety limits". The samples were sent for examination to the CFTRI and the CFL and her statement was based on their findings.

Though the safety standards had been met by the soft drinks manufacturers, the Government was considering bringing in European Union (E.U.) norms for water content in soft drinks, she said. "It is also to be noted that the assertion of the soft drink manufacturers that their product is within the E.U. standards has not proven to be correct for 100 per cent of the samples."

Later, Ms. Swaraj told reporters that the JPC could consist of 14 or 21 members. If it was a 21-member panel, 14 could be from the Lok Sabha and seven from the Rajya Sabha.

"The existing norms may have been adequate some time ago when the use of pesticides in India was much less, but now with increasing use of pesticides, the groundwater and other water sources are likely to be more contaminated and therefore stricter norms need to be in place," she conceded.

By April 2004, E.U. norms would be enforced for bottled mineral water, and "there was no reason for the Government not to consider applying the same norms to the water content in soft drinks as well", she said. The norms would specify the methodology of tests the product needed to pass. She denied the CSE's charge that the lethal chemical, malathion, was present in the soft drinks. If the CSE report had been correct on this point, "we would have been dead", she said. But she emphasised that she did not want to denigrate the CSE and was thankful to it for highlighting a problem that needed attention.

**CSE and cola companies
stick to stand: Page 12**

THE HINDU

22 AUG 2003

Deadline for CBI Taj probe

OUR LEGAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 21: The Supreme Court today directed the CBI to complete investigations into the Taj heritage corridor scam by September 11 and submit a report to the court the same day.

The bureau's plea for four months more to complete the probe was thus rejected. It had submitted an interim report to the apex court last week.

On the basis of the report, a division bench of Justices M.B. Shah and A.R. Lakshmanan observed that the "high and mighty" were involved, including "four to five important officers". So "a higher officer of the CBI" should interrogate them, the judges directed.

The bureau should also interrogate "the person who is wielding the authority there (in Uttar Pradesh)", they said.

"On the basis of the report, we direct a higher official of CBI to immediately interrogate four to five or more persons who are involved in the decision-making process to grant contract for the construction of the Taj heritage corridor project," the bench said in its brief order.

Declining to make the interim report public, the bench said it was imperative for the CBI to speed up the investigation so

persons named did not get time to "manoeuvre".

The bench ordered that the report be kept in sealed covers as "it would not be proper to make public the names of the persons at this stage".

The director of the Central Forensic Science Laboratory was ordered to engage a handwriting expert for an opinion on the alleged interpolation of certain documents.

The bench rejected the plea of court commissioner and amicus curiae Krishan Mahajan that the officials named in the report be suspended pending investigation. They could not be suspended without a hearing, the judges observed.

For the CBI, additional solicitor-general Altaf Ahmed said that one of the four or five important persons the bureau questioned in the preliminary stage "refused to sign a single paper". The bench said the bureau could question that person again.

The Rs 175-crore corridor project was feared to endanger the 17th century Taj Mahal and devastate the Yamuna because of land reclamation.

The bench said that Rs 17 crore were released for the corridor construction, violating rules and norms and without sanction from departments such as pollution control, environment and tourism.

Clean chit to colas, Opp cries cheat

HTF 1 228

Environment

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 21

THE CENTRE on Thursday gave a clean chit to all the 12 soft drinks brands in the pesticide controversy, but was forced to agree to a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe after the Opposition alleged it was bribed by the cola majors.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Sushma Swaraj told the Lok Sabha that the government's tests had found the colas safe for drinking according to current Indian norms — that is, the Prevention of Food Adulteration (PFA) rules relating to packaged drinking water.

But she virtually acknowledged the laxity of these standards by adding that the Centre might introduce the stricter European Union norms for soft drinks as well as packaged water. She also admitted that 9 of the 12 samples were unsafe according to the EU norms.

As soon as the minister gave a certificate of safety to the colas, the Opposition alleged a "cover-up job". Congressman Satyavrat Chaturvedi asked the government how much "donation" it had received from the soft drinks giants ahead of the elections.

An angry Swaraj replied she was prepared for a discussion but the Opposition, led by Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav, said it would not settle for anything less than a JPC probe, to which the government agreed.

Swaraj said that tests by the Mysore-based Central Food Tech-

Neither Choke-a-Cola nor Pepsicide

Samples collected from Ghaziabad, Jaipur, Mathura... plants from where CSE got them



How many times higher than EU norms?

	Govt says	CSE says
Coca-Cola	4.0	45
Pepsi	Nil	37
Limca	Nil	30
Diet Pepsi	Nil	14
Fanta	1.7	43
Mirinda (Lemon)	4.2	70
Mountain Dew	2.0	28
Thums Up	2.0	22
7 Up	1.6	33
Mirinda (Orange)	3.4	39
Sprite	3.2	11
Blue Pepsi	5.2	29

nological Research Institute (CFTRI) and the Kolkata-based Central Food Laboratory (CFL) showed that the pesticide residues in all 12 samples was much lower than those found by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). But she acknowledged that "the assertion of soft drink manufacturers that their products are within EU limits has also not proved correct... in

some cases they are a few times higher than the EU limit."

The minister said the samples collected by the Centre came from the same bottling units from which the CSE had got its samples. The CFTRI found the pesticide residues within EU limits in 11 of the samples. "In the remaining one, they were found above the limit by 1.6 times to 5.2 times, whereas the

CSE alleges... the residues are higher... (by) 11 to 70 times", Swaraj said. Similar results were received from the CFL.

"The CFTRI conducted an additional sophisticated test using the GCMS method for identification of the molecular structure of all the pesticides in the samples. This is a confirmatory test not done by the CSE," Swaraj said.

CSE director Sunita Narain,

Bengal backtracks

THE BENGAL government on Thursday climbed down from its tough posturings against the cola majors, saying it would not act against them even if the state pollution control board finds their products unsafe for drinking. The test report, to be released on Friday, will not be made public. Instead, it will be sent to the Centre, which alone has the right to act against the companies, Environment Minister Manab Mukherjee said. The state will not even recommend any action. Mukherjee had earlier vowed to close down the bottling units if cola samples were found to be high on pesticides. On Thursday, he said, "We don't have any right to take action against the soft drink manufacturers."

HTC, Kolkata

however, questioned the methodology used in the Centre's tests and said the government had acted in "private interest, not in public. We need to know when and where the samples were picked up and their batch numbers."

PepsiCo India welcomed the government clean chit and said it might take legal action against CSE.

Doctor says Paes may have a common malady

HT Correspondent & PTI
Kolkata, August 21

SO FAR, so good. Leander Paes is a lot chirpier than he was two days ago. And his doctor thinks he may not have brain tumour but a brain cyst from an infection "rather common in India".

"While not yet proven in Leander's situation, one rather common infection in India causing such a brain lesion is cisticercus granuloma caused by the larval form of a tapeworm," said Dr Clarence Brown, president-chairman of the MD Anderson Cancer Centre, where Paes is being treated. He said results of numerous tests on Paes are still being awaited.

"He is no longer experiencing headaches and his vision is normal. He remains in excellent spirits and is physically active."

The player's sister, Jackie, said she spoke to Leander on Wednesday and "he sounded a lot better". Father Vece left the city on Thursday evening to catch a connection to Orlando — the doctor and hockey Olympian had missed his flight on Wednesday. Jackie said Vece is expected to be at Leander's side early on Saturday (Indian time).

The dizziness and giddiness that had been bothering Leander since the Toronto Open has abated, Jackie said. Before departure, Vece Paes said on television that Leander played some basketball at the hospital on Wednesday.

Parties in a fix over Malda erosion

Statesman News Service

MALDA, Aug. 17. — All political parties in Malda have emphasised the need for rehabilitation of erosion victims, but have failed to decide how to rehabilitate them.

The Malda district magistrate, Mr AK Bala, today convened an all-party meeting to discuss ways to check erosion of the Ganga and combat the flood situation in the district. Political parties unanimously expressed their dissatisfaction over the work being carried out by the state irrigation department to prevent erosion in the district.

The food processing and horticulture minister, Mr Sailen Sarkar, said the state government had raised the rehabilitation issue in the Cabinet but failed to implement the project because of paucity of funds.

The state is not in a position to implement the project without financial assistance from the Centre, said Mr Sarkar.

The minister urged the political leaders, including those in the Left Front, to launch a joint movement to press for implementation of the rehabilitation project.

Mr Sarkar asked the sabhadhipati of the Malda zilla parishad to inform the MP, Mr ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury, about the proposed movement against

Ganga merges with Pagla

MALDA, Aug. 17. — The Ganga and Pagla rivers merged in the Malda district, affecting about 5,000 people, officials said today.

Ganga and Pagla merged together in Panchananpur area of the district last night, affecting some 5,000 people, Malda district parishad chief Mr Gautam Chakraborty said.

The district administration has sounded an alert in five blocks — Kaliachak I, Kaliachak II, Kaliachak III, English Bazar and Manikchak — about possible erosion. — PTI

the Centre.

The minister said all political leaders, including the MLAs and the MPs of Malda and Murshidabad, would go to Delhi to apprise the leaders at the Centre of the grave situation in the district.

Some leaders pointed out that the erosion victims might be rehabilitated in the land marked in different blocks. But Mr AH Khan Choudhury proposed that the banks of the Ganga would be protected in a better fashion with the aid of foreign technology as the existing technology had proved to be a failure.

He pointed out that the Bagladesh government had been able to protect the Padma bank line with Japanese assistance.

The district Congress president, Mrs Rubi Noor, urged the administration to decide how to tackle flood and erosion in the district.

The LF convenor, Mr Jiban Maitra, suggested that land that had come up on the right bank of the Ganga, after eroding the left bank, which is currently administered by the Jharkhand government, should be measured based on the mouja map of Malda district and distributed to erosion victims officially.

According to the superintending engineer, Mr B Dey, more than 53.20 hectare land has been eroded on the left bank of the Ganga at Kaliachak II, Englishbazar and Manikchak. The Kaliachak II and Ratua blocks were the worst affected.

The DM's report says 525 families have been affected by erosion at Harishchandrapur, 600 at Ratua, 900 at Manikchak and 1350 at Kaliachak II.

The spokesperson of the Malda irrigation department assured that a dyke would be constructed in the Jotekosturi area within the next seven days as a step to prevent erosion.

The remaining part of the second defence line of the eighth retired embankment would also be completed soon, he said.

Heatwave scorches France, 3,000 dead

By Marc Burleigh

Paris: France's health ministry said on Thursday that up to 3,000 people may have died across the country from a two-week heatwave that scorched much of Europe, confirming the toll put forward by doctors who had accused the government of underestimating the scale of the disaster.

"The (death) figures are high, perhaps even very high. We can now talk about what happened as a true epidemic, with everything that means in terms of the number of victims," health minister Jean-Francois Mattei said in an interview to France Inter radio.

The acknowledgement followed

days of warnings from doctors, police and undertakers that bodies had piled up staggeringly quickly in the 40-degree-Celsius temperatures that had baked the country.

An association of hospital emergency room doctors, AMUHF, which had accused the government of underestimating the crisis, held a news conference to say it estimated 2,000 people had died during the hot weather.

"The figures are becoming catastrophic," the head of the association, Patrick Pelloux, said. "We can talk about thousands of victims, even though we can't yet fully measure the phenomenon." AFP

15 AUG 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Supreme Court rejects Coke plea for fresh testing

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, Aug. 13: Coca-Cola India today received a strong rebuff from the Supreme Court which refused to entertain the cola multinational's petition seeking independent testing of its soft drink brands to prove that they were safe to consume.

Rejecting Coke's contention that the Union and state governments should not take action on the basis of an NGO's report that its soft drinks contained unacceptably high pesticide residue, a division bench of Justices S. Rajendra Babu and A.R. Lakshmanan observed that no right of the cola company was infringed

upon, declining the plea.

The bench allowed Kapil Sibal, senior counsel for Coca-Cola, to withdraw the petition, which in legal parlance is known as "dismissed as withdrawn".

The judges wondered why some cola companies had moved the Delhi and other high courts while others chose to approach the apex court directly.

The bench also declined to entertain Sibal's plea that the petition be treated as a public interest litigation (PIL) as it would "protect the interest of the consumers" at large.

"We approached the Supreme Court to quickly address the current consumer confusion

on this issue. The Supreme Court did not want to interfere at this early stage but said we could return later if necessary," said Sunil Gupta, vice-president, public affairs and communications, at Coca-Cola India.

In a signed statement, Coke said: "We continue to believe that a consistent, professional testing protocol is necessary if the interests of consumers and the interests of beverage manufacturers are to be jointly served."

The statement said "consumers need to know that the products they are buying in one part of India are manufactured under the same quality and safety standards that apply in all

other parts of the country".

Earlier, Sibal said various municipalities in Bengal, Punjab and Rajasthan had initiated the process to ban the sale of Coca-Cola "merely" on the basis of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) report.

The judges said the petitioner could approach "whichever forum" he deemed appropriate to "enforce his right" but "we will not entertain this petition".

Last week, Pepsi-Cola had made a similar plea before Delhi High court, which ordered the government to form a body of experts to test the soft drink samples.

Sibal today requested the

Supreme Court to issue an order to the various governments not to ban the sales of the soft drink "at least" till a committee of experts to be set up by the Union government tested the samples and gave its opinion.

Interestingly, Sibal admitted that the CSE report had hurt Coke sales as public across the country were shunning soft drinks — a point that Coca-Cola India has consistently refused to acknowledge.

When the judges declined to accept any of his arguments, Sibal said if the Supreme Court refused to entertain the plea, where else could the manufacturers go, advancing the "doc-

trine of forum shopping". The judges said there were many "appropriate forums" as the cola company was selling its products throughout the country.

The Bihar government today jumped on to the testing bandwagon by collecting soft drink samples from the Coke factory in Patliputra and Pepsi's unit in Hajipur. The samples were collected by the state's health department and sent for testing to the Central Food Laboratory in Calcutta.

The department will start further action after the laboratory submits its reports on the findings. There is, however, one bit of good news for Coca-Cola India, which has had a rough week

since the CSE revelations on August 5. Kerala's health minister P. Sankaran informed the state Assembly today that an interim test report on samples of Coca-Cola from the company's Plachimada plant in Kerala had revealed that the sludge did not contain cadmium and the lead content was much lower than the permissible level.

US embassy
The US embassy today said it was "carefully following" the controversy over the alleged presence of pesticides in soft drinks made by Coca-Cola and Pepsi, adds PTI.

"Coca-Cola and Pepsi are working intensively with the Indian government to clarify these issues with the assistance of independent scientific experts and laboratories," the embassy said in a release.

Both Coca-Cola and Pepsi are confident that their products meet or exceed the highest national and international quality and safety standards, it said.

Stating that the embassy was in close contact with the two companies, the release said: "Coca-Cola and Pepsi are highly reputable and responsible firms with worldwide operations. They have repeatedly emphasised it is their top priority to provide the consumer with safe products".

14/8

14/8

Crude spill fuels fears of eco-disaster

KARACHI, AUG. 13. A Greek-registered oil tanker that ran aground off Karachi's coast has developed cracks in its hull and is threatening to break apart and spill tons of oil in rich fishing waters, port officials and environmentalists said on Wednesday.

A low tide Wednesday morning put extra stress on the MT Tasman Spirit — which is already leaking oil — and caused the ship to buckle, said Ahmed Hayat, Chairman of the Karachi Port Trust, which manages the southern city's port.

"The ship has cracked and can break apart within 12 hours," Mr. Hayat said.

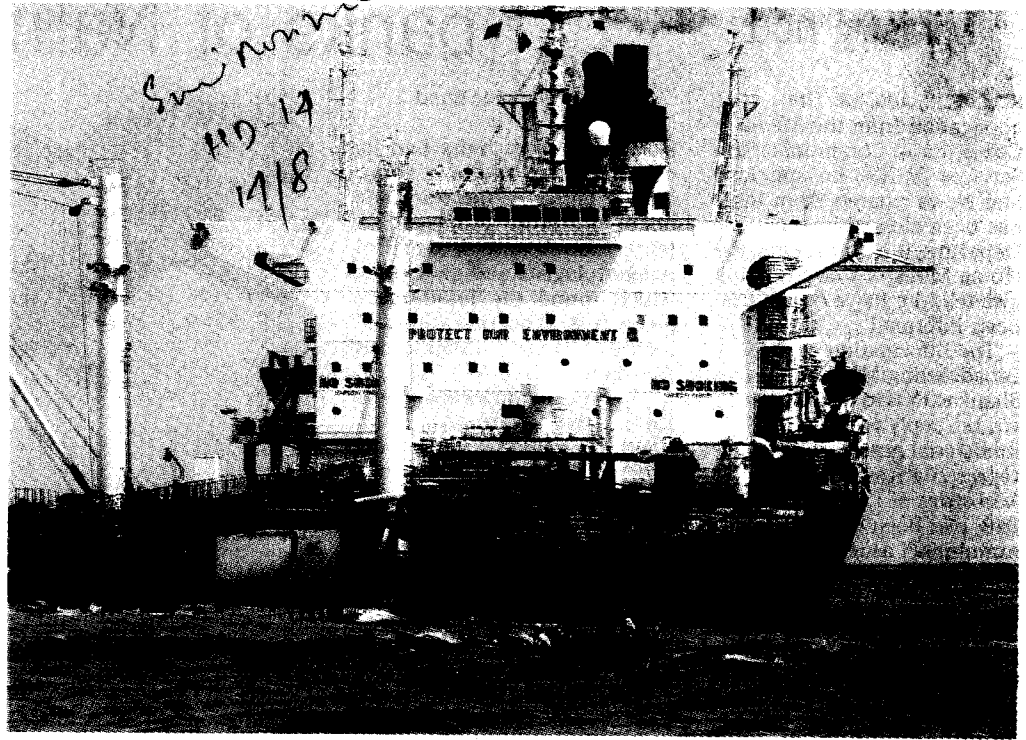
The tanker ran aground on July 27 in monsoon rains and high tides, and crews have been racing to siphon off oil to make the vessel lighter so it can be pulled to deeper waters. The ship was carrying 62,000 tons of crude oil for state-run Pakistan Refinery Ltd., and about 20,000 tons have already been siphoned off into a second tanker, officials said. The ship was chartered by the Pakistan National Shipping Corp.

Brig. Iftikhar Arshad, general manager at the Karachi Port Trust, said the ship had about 12 tanks and four had been emptied. Only three of the remaining tanks were 'vulnerable,' and each one contains about 5,000 tons of oil, he said.

An unknown amount of oil has already leaked out of the ship, and Karachi's government closed all public beaches on Wednesday afternoon, city official Hanif Akbar said. Children were finding dead fish and sea turtles covered in oil.

"If the oil spill is on a big scale, it will affect all marine life," said Ahmed Saeed, head of environment assessment services at IUCN, the World Conservation Union.

He added that if the spill



The Greek oil tanker, Tasman Spirit, which ran aground at Karachi harbour on Wednesday. (Below) People collecting oil leaked from the tanker. — Reuters, AP

makes its way to Karachi's mangrove forests — rich breeding grounds for local fisheries — it would seriously threaten fish eggs and other marine life like sea turtles, shrimp, crabs and even dolphins.

But Mr. Hayat played down the threat of the spill reaching the mangroves. "The mangrove forest is in no danger from the spill because the oil would have to pass through the port to get to the forest, and we are controlling the spill at the port." He explained that the Port Authority had cordoned the ship off with "booms," large air-filled balloon-like objects made of rubber, that stop the spill from spreading and suck in the oil which is disposed of later.

Work on the oil transfer got



off to a slow start when the ship's pumps got stuck and stopped working.

The problem was fixed and

oil from the tanker was being moved to another tanker that arrived from the United Arab Emirates. — AP

ONE FINDS

14 AUG 2003

OF FINDS

Govt. ordered to test soft drinks samples

By Our Staff Reporter 19/8

NEW DELHI, AUG. 11. The Delhi High Court today directed the Union Government to get samples of the soft drinks produced by PepsiCo India Holdings Pvt. Ltd. tested in accredited laboratories for presence of pesticide residues within three weeks and submit a report to it.

Justice B.D. Ahmed issued the direction when the Additional Solicitor-General of India, K.K. Sud, agreed to a proposal by the former Solicitor-General of India, Harish Salve, counsel for the petitioner company, that his client was ready to have its soft drinks tested.

Mr. Justice Ahmed directed PepsiCo and the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), whose test report brought the com-

pany to the court, to supply all scientific and technical data available with them regarding such tests to the Government to facilitate rigorous tests of the samples.

The judge also noted the CSE's contribution towards bringing the issue of contamination of soft drinks to public notice.

The court issued notices to all the respondents, including the Union Government through the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Canteen Stores Department (CSD) through the Defence Ministry and the Ministry of Food Processing Industries, for September 22. A counter-reply and a rejoinder to it would have to be filed within four weeks and five weeks respectively from today, Justice Ahmed said.

The court passed the orders on a civil writ petition filed by PepsiCo seeking a di-

rection to the Government not to rely on the CSE report.

Mr. Justice Ahmed also directed the petitioner company to file a reply to a show-cause notice issued to it by CSD threatening to stop purchase of soft drinks produced by the petitioner in view of the CSE findings.

The CSE director, Sumita Narain, who was present in the court during the hearing, later expressed satisfaction over the court orders.

Mr. Sud also assured the court that the Central Committee on Food Standards would take up the issue of setting standards for presence of pesticides in soft drinks when Mr. Justice Ahmed drew his attention to his admission made earlier that at the moment there was no ceiling on the presence of pesticides in soft drinks

1 2 AUG 2003

'House nod must for river water pacts'

Committee meeting. \$10-7

By Our Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG 11. The Irrigation Minister, T. M. Jacob, today introduced the Kerala Irrigation and Water Conservation Bill seeking to bring inter-State river water agreements within the purview of the State Legislature, prohibition of inter-linking of river waters, establishment of a Dam Safety Authority and farmers' participation in water resources management and utilisation.

Piloting the Bill through its preliminary stages, the Minister said Section 30 of the Bill clearly stated that "no water from a water course in the State shall be distributed to any other State or Union Territory except in accordance with an agreement between the State Government and the Government of such other State or the Union territory in terms of a resolution passed by the State Legislative Assembly to that effect."

In other words, the provision precludes the possibilities of any Governmental decisions without the knowledge of the Legislature, he added. The Minister said the legislation envisaged the setting up of a Dam Safety Authority, comprising officials and experts. The Bill, which was referred to the Subject Committee, also prohibits diversion of water from one river to another.

Mr. Jacob said the new Bill had been

introduced in the context of the need to protect the State's water resources through a comprehensive unified law. The existing laws governing irrigation were as old as 1865 and had not been renewed in tune with the changing times. The existence of different types of laws in the Travancore-Kochi and Malabar areas had also posed several administrative hurdles. The new Bill had been brought in the context of the vast changes that had taken place in the concept of water management and utilisation.

The Minister said the Bill provides for a novel concept of water resources management with the participation of the farm community. The Bill has provisions which empowers farmers committee to carry out maintenance of field channels and canals, besides instituting a social audit mechanism that ensures equitable sharing of water resources among farming communities. A Water Management and Utilisation Board would also be set up to advise the Government on issues related to water management and irrigation.

He said the Bill had been drafted on the basis of the sentiments and opinions expressed at an all-party meeting convened by the Chief Minister.

He said the Government had an open mind on such an important legislation and was not averse to any suggestions from the Opposition during the Subject

He said the Government was not averse to the proposal to appoint judicial officers to head the Dam Safety Authority. He said the proposed legislation had provisions which banned sand-mining within 500 meters of dams, checkdams and other irrigation facilities.

Marad: Govt. to consult parties

By Our Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, AUG. 11. The Chief Minister, A. K. Antony, has said that the Government proposed to hold more consultations with major political parties on the rehabilitation of families displaced from Marad following the May 2 violence.

Replying to a submission by V. K. C. Mammed Koya (CPI-M) in the Assembly today, the Chief Minister said informal parleys were already on between the Government and the Opposition on the subject. The Government was keen on resuming rehabilitation of the displaced families at the earliest, he added.

He said the Beypore police had registered a case on five counts against the persons who had threatened one Ummer and family, who had returned to Marad.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 8, 2003

CONFIRMED 12
CORPORATE IRRESPONSIBILITY 12/8/8

MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES HAVE been put in the dock once again by the Centre for Science and Environment: its laboratory tests have revealed that the soft drinks marketed by these firms contain pesticide residues well in excess of European Union norms. Just six months ago the CSE's tests of bottled drinking water sold by Coca Cola and Pepsi revealed levels of toxicity that would not meet international regulations. That was clearly not enough warning for the global giants to tighten quality standards in all their products. It says something as well of the Government's attitude towards food safety norms that after introducing new regulations for bottled drinking water, it did not formulate similar standards for soft drinks. It has taken the latest round of CSE tests to goad the Bureau of Indian Standards into reviewing the norms for soft drinks.

The responses of the two companies to the new findings have been less than responsible. The corporates have merely asserted that their products are absolutely safe. They have even turned aggressive with threats of legal action against the CSE. And one of the firms, Coca Cola, has now released the results of an independent test conducted in the Netherlands that do not in any way establish that its soft drinks meet food safety norms. The examination by the Dutch laboratory was only of sets of bottled water produced in different locations in India. Those one-time tests showed that the chosen samples of drinking water products did meet safety standards. However, the soft drinks produced in the country were themselves not tested in the laboratory. The cola companies have to demonstrate that they are serious about meeting food safety norms and specifically that they do not follow double standards in India. The problem, of course, is partly that the existing national regulations allow the firms to be lax about standards. The Government does not at

present specify detailed norms. This, however, does not absolve the corporates of the duty of independently following the strictest of standards. The argument that there are many other products on the market in India — fresh and processed agricultural produce — that contain far greater residues of pesticide is also no defence for the soft drink giants. Companies that claim to have introduced world class products in the country should also be able to raise the bar in domestic food safety standards.

Much as the multinational soft drink companies have a lot to account for, there are issues in the production and use of pesticides and also in groundwater quality where the Government has been found wanting. For one thing, the CSE tests of both drinking water and soft drinks revealed the presence of pesticides like DDT whose use in agriculture is prohibited. Obviously the state agencies have been lax in monitoring the production and use of banned pesticides. Secondly, environment groups have for years been emphasising that aggressive marketing by manufacturers and poor agricultural extension services have led to farmers spraying excessive amounts of pesticides on their crops. The result has been that these toxic products either remain as residues on the agricultural produce or leach into the soil and then enter the aquifers. Thirdly, agricultural and drinking water needs are increasingly being met from groundwater, especially during years of a rainfall deficiency. In the absence of any monitoring of groundwater, the chemical residues in these resources are entering the food chain or are present in drinking water. If the present controversy turns the Government's attention towards preventing pesticides from percolating into groundwater and towards enforcing strict standards in supplies of drinking water and all food products, a lot will be achieved in improving food safety.

THE HINDU

8 AUG 2003

Associated Press

Deadly heat wave leaves Europe gasping

ROME, Aug. 7. — A deadly heat wave in Europe blamed for deaths, drying rivers and scorching wildfires could last through September, experts say.

Belgium's Royal Meteorological Institute predicted it could reach 40 °C today — the highest temperature it has ever forecast since the institute's founding in 1833.

The death toll blamed on the blistering temperatures or on fires fed by the heat rose to 38 today, after Croatian police reported the death of an officer deployed to guard the US embassy in Zagreb.

In Italy, fires raging across the country today forced officials to close a state road on the Amalfi coast in the south and evacuate some homes as a precaution in



HOT AND WILD: Two boys and a German shepherd escape from the heat by bathing in the Ruhr river near Schwerte, Germany, on Wednesday. — AFP

Tuscany and the northwest. hundreds of hectares (acres) of

Water-toting helicopters and planes were dousing the flames, which have already destroyed state-funded CNR research centre

said the heat wave was among the five worst in the last 150 years and would likely last until September.

High-temperature records have also been broken in several French cities, and London, where betters wagered on just how high the mercury would rise, registered its highest-temperature ever yesterday — 35.4 °C.

Wildfires, fanned by hot winds, were reported in Croatia, Greece, Spain, Portugal and France, as well as Italy. In the German state of Brandenburg, which surrounds Berlin, authorities today said a total of 160,000 hectares of forest had been closed to the public because of the danger of fires.

Few facets of life escaped the heat wave, which was particularly oppressive because air conditioning in homes and shops is uncommon in much of Europe.

Passing the bucket

W 5/10 Soft drinks, softer laws *Environment*

If only consumer safety laws in the country were drafted and applied as quickly and efficiently as Parliament's reaction to reports on high toxin levels in soft drinks and banned colas from its canteen! MPs will look after themselves without being told. But they are also public representatives and lawmakers. Their responsibility does not include indulgence in a spot of MNC-bashing. Indian food and beverage companies in general are no better, and probably worse, when it comes to quality control. Recently there were reports that the European Union had refused to accept exports of Indian spices because of high levels of artificial colouring. Whether Coca-Cola and Pepsico use water that contains too much pesticide or whether Indian spice merchants redden up their chilli powder, the issue is the same — bad laws and worse implementation. In the soft drink/pesticide case examined by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), the incredible fact emerges that although manufacturers have to obtain clearances from as many as nine authorities, there is no requirement in law that water, the basic ingredient, be tested. Why? Because the providers are official agencies and ex hypothesi can do no wrong or in the alternative are immune from accountability. The government requires that companies like Coca-Cola and Pepsico use potable water but does not consider it necessary to define potability.

The Prevention of Food Adulteration (PFA) authorities, therefore, test Coke, Pepsi, Mirinda, Sprite, etc for cola concentrates, fruit pulp, sugar, etc but not for contamination levels in the water in which is all this mixed. PFA officials say the PFA Act does not include water. The buck, or the bucket, is passed to the urban development ministry. But the latter only has guidelines, not legally enforceable norms, for drinking water. Water is a state subject, central officials say. The Bureau of Indian Standards has norms for bottled (mineral) water. Even that was shown to be inadequate by an earlier CSE study. New BIS norms have been drafted. Perhaps, BIS will be tasked to frame norms for soft drinks, too. But the basic problem is the quality of ground water and the lack of legal teeth in enforcing standards. To begin with, the PFA Act should be amended. As for Coca-Cola and Pepsico, their aggressive counters to CSE findings does not answer why soft drinks sold in the West have lower toxin levels than those gulped down by Indians. The answer is: in India manufacturers know they can get away with it.

Study finds pesticides in soft drinks

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 5

DIL MANGE more... pesticides? Delhi NGO Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) released a report on Tuesday that revealed high pesticide content in 12 major soft drink brands it tested. In a rare show of unity, market leaders Coke and Pepsi held a joint press conference later in the day to junk the claim and threatened legal action against the NGO.

CSE has found high levels of DDT, malathion, lindane and chlorpyrifos — toxic pesticides and insecticides — in major brands. In the long term, these chemical compounds can trigger cancer or birth defects, decrease

the sperm count and damage the central nervous system.

The level of pesticides in Pepsi is 37 times that allowed by European Economic Commission (EEC) norms, says CSE. The figure for Coke brands is over 40. Individually, Mirinda Lemon was found to be particularly thick with pesticides — 70 times the level allowed by the EEC norm (0.0005 mg/litre). Coca Cola (45 times) is followed by Fanta (43), Mirinda Orange (39) and Pepsi (37).

Surprisingly, the NGO found no pesticides — not even the permissible level — in the two bottles of Coke and Pepsi that they obtained from the US.

Hitting back at the NGO, Rajiv

Bakshi of Pepsi and Sanjeev Gupta of Coke said the allegations were "wild, baseless and should be disregarded". They questioned the authenticity of the report, saying CSE doesn't have the expertise to conduct such sophisticated tests. "We get our products tested from 'gold standard' laboratories in Hyderabad and the Netherlands. Moreover, the Prevention of Food Adulteration department picks up random samples every 10-12 days. All our products are world standard and meet the compliance standards of the Bureau of Indian Standards," their joint statement said.

CSE director Sumita Narain said the tests were conducted at the NGO's laboratory under the

supervision of Dr H.B. Mathur, an IIT alumnus. "The accepted GC-ECD and GC-NPD procedures were used to test for 16 pesticides. All samples contained pesticides and in all the samples, the count was higher than EEC standards," she told a news conference.

Narain said the country has no laws to regulate the quality of water, which is the basic raw material for soft drinks. "Neither the Food Products Order, 1955, nor the Prevention of Food Adulteration Rules, 1955, lay down the standard for checking pesticide residues in soft drinks," said Narain.

According to her, the pesticide findings is particularly alarming as the soft drink industry is growing in India.

Injurious to health?



CULPRITS Pepsi, Mountain Dew, Diet Pepsi, Mirinda Orange, Mirinda Lemon, Blue Pepsi, 7-Up, Coca-Cola, Fanta, Limca, Sprite, Thums Up

CONTAMINANTS Residues of four toxic pesticides and insecticides — lindane, DDT, malathion, chlorpyrifos

DANGERS Can cause cancer, affect the central nervous system

EQUALLY GUILTY Pepsi and Coca-Cola brands have similar amounts of pesticide residue — about 40 times higher than the permitted limit. Mirinda Lemon had highest pesticide content among the brands tested

Environment

X(1) 6/8

Residues of toxic pesticides in 12 soft drink brands: CSE

Coca-Cola, PepsiCo challenge findings

By Our Staff Reporter *C. Vinay*

NEW DELHI, AUG. 5. The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) today announced that samples of 12 soft drink brands collected for testing from in and around Delhi contained residues of four extremely toxic pesticides and insecticides — lindane, DDT, malathion and chlorpyrifos. The multinational companies, Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, immediately challenged the report and indicated that they might consider legal action.

Presenting the findings at a press conference here today, the Director, CSE, Sunita Narain, said that in all the samples, the levels of pesticide residues far exceeded the maximum residue limit for pesticides in water used as "food" as set down by the European Economic Commission (EEC).

She said that each sample had enough poison to cause long-term cancer, damage to the nervous and reproductive systems, birth defects and severe disruption of the immune system.

The tested soft drinks include Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Mountain Dew, Diet Pepsi, Mirinda Orange, Mirinda Lemon, Blue Pepsi, 7Up, Fanta, Limca, Sprite and Thums Up.

Ms. Narain said that according to the findings, Coca-Cola and Pepsi had almost similar concentration of pesticide residues. While contaminants in Pepsi were 37 times higher than the EEC limit, Coca-Cola overstepped the norm having 45 times the prescribed limit of pesticide contamination.

Faring the worst in the "health test", accord-

ing to her, was Mirinda Lemon followed by Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Fanta, Mirinda Orange, 7Up, Mountain Dew, Limca, Thums Up and Sprite. It was also found that pesticides in soft drinks were similar to those in bottled water, which the CSE had tested earlier this year.

Releasing the report, Ms. Narain said: "The inference drawn from the tests is that groundwater used for making soft drinks is infested with pesticides."

Another interesting find was the fact that the same brands found and tested abroad did not contain these pesticides."

"Why these companies are never booked in India is simply because one cannot take them to court since the norms that regulate manufacture of cold (soft) drinks here are not well defined. The 'food' sector is virtually unregulated," she said.

Reacting to the CSE report, both the multinational companies — Coca-Cola and Pepsi — described it as "unreliable" and indicated that they might resort to legal action.

The chairman of PepsiCo, Rajiv Bakshi, said, "Our company is well within the limits of the pesticide residue norms set by the European Union for water used in products within public domain. We conform to all norms and are open to all testing by an internationally-accredited independent laboratory and by experienced people."

The chief executive officer of Coke, Sanjiv Gupta, said, "Our product is world class and is the same we sell in Europe and the U.S. These are tested by top grade labs like Vimta in Hyderabad and TNO in The Netherlands."

06 AUG 2003

ONE FINDS

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 6, 2003

environment
10-10

INTERLINKING PROBLEMS

8/8

THE DECADES-OLD proposal to link all of India's major rivers with one another was revived with much fanfare last year. Most political parties welcomed it then as a solution to the country's drinking water and irrigation problems. But it has not taken long for the proposal to come face to face with the hard reality of planning what will be the largest project ever taken up in India. A number of States, from Punjab in the north to Kerala in the south, have expressed their opposition to a transfer of river waters from their territory to other States. The latest example is the considerable anxiety in Kerala about including a link between the Pampa and the Achankovil (flowing through Kerala) and the Vaippar (in Tamil Nadu) in the proposed national river grid. This is only one of many reasons why the ambitious, many would say unrealistic, schedules for execution of the project have already been thrown out of gear.

The high-level task force on the project, constituted in December 2002, was expected to prepare the schedule for completion of feasibility studies and estimate the cost of the project by the end of April this year. It was to then come up in June with the options for funding the project. It was also expected to convene a meeting in May/June of State Chief Ministers and obtain their agreement and cooperation. None of these deadlines has been met and there is no indication that these events will take place in the near future. This is not surprising, for while the interlinking proposal has been spoken about for decades, all the complex engineering, economic, environmental and social issues involved in the project have never been

carefully studied. It is, therefore, not an easy task to draw up in a few months even the time lines for implementation. It will also be impossible to complete within a decade (as decreed by the Supreme Court) execution of a project that at first approximation is estimated to cost Rs. 5,60,000 crores, which is twice the size of India's gross domestic product at present. In fact, the one Government committee that did examine aspects of the proposal to some extent, the National Commission for an Integrated Water Resources Development Plan, was in 1999 ambivalent about the benefits of interlinking the country's rivers.

The drought of 2002 was the context in which the proposal to build a grid connecting India's rivers was revived. Before another drought leads to another round of active interest in the project, it is necessary to come up with answers to two broad sets of questions. The first question is, what will be the total costs and benefits of a river grid project in economic, environmental and social terms. The second will be, what are the different options to meet the future requirements of water and is the interlinking proposal the best among them. Answers to these questions will have to address issues in agricultural technology, patterns of water use, extraction of ground and surface water resources, efficiency in consumption of water in crop cultivation, resource mobilisation, human displacement and changes in the environment. A plan on such a scale and of such complexity as the proposal to link the country's rivers can be taken up only after a range of such substantive issues are analysed threadbare.



HOT AND BOTHERED: Children frolic in the Trocadero fountains in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris on Monday, with temperatures reaching 35 degrees Celsius in the city. (Right) Flames engulf a forest close to an important motorway in central Portugal on Sunday. — AFP, AP

Heat wave, forest fires wreak havoc across Europe

By Vaiju Naravane

PARIS, AUG. 5. Twenty-five people have perished in a series of raging forest fires that ravaged huge swathes of territory across Spain, Portugal, France and Italy as Europe continues to be in the grip of the worst heat wave since record keeping began 130 years ago.

A stubborn anti-cyclone has settled over the European landmass, keeping out rain-bearing winds from the Atlantic and sucking in hot air from the Sahara desert in Africa.

Eleven people have died in Portugal alone in the last two days, prompting the Govern-

ment to declare a national calamity.

Helicopters and fire-fighting planes imported from Canada, Russia, Italy and France have been pressed into service. Thousands of people have seen their homes destroyed and vacationers have had to leave their campsites to be herded into schools and gymnasiums for safety. In what has been described as one of the hottest summers in recorded history, fires are raging across parts of Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and the Adriatic coast.

No all the fires are due to natural causes. Police forces across Europe say arsonists

have been at work.

"We know there are people who have gone around lighting these fires for the sheer diabolic pleasure of seeing the forest go up in flames. This is worse than criminal. These people will be found and they will be punished," a French Interior Ministry official said.

While natural causes play a part, human greed and selfishness are at the root of many of the fires. Environmentalists say the fires are encouraged by modern plantations that have changed the eco-system and made it more fragile. "Even 20 years ago, these countries had a substantial rural population.

Rural folk know how to clear the underbrush, they know how to look after forests. Now, only four per cent of our land is under cultivation and rural people have moved out. The forest has become a place of recreation used essentially by hikers and vacationers who do not know how to respect the laws of nature. They do not understand that setting up a barbecue or throwing a cigarette butt into the bushes could start an inferno. Also, the forests have been taken over by companies which have replanted them with plantations — that is to say, only one type of tree either eucalyptus or acacia.

These are commercial plantations for the paper and pulp industry. Unfortunately, the trees are fast growing and much more flammable," said Michel Peyrac of the Friends of the Earth environmental group.

Firemen found three charred bodies of people in their cars in central Portugal on Saturday, while a man in his 50s was also found dead after attempting to escape the fires in his tractor.

Firemen and volunteer services battled to put out almost 100 separate blazes spread across large expanses of forest. European cities are sweltering. Florence, Pisa, Rome, Madrid and even Paris saw mercury

breaking the symbolic 40 degree Celsius mark.

The south-western cities of Toulouse and Bordeaux recorded temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius on Monday. In the Extremadura region of Spain where temperatures crossed the 50 degrees mark, one more person died of heat stroke on Sunday, bringing the total number of the dead since Thursday to seven.

"Old people and children are amongst the worst sufferers and I have treated several people suffering from ozone pollution and heat stroke in the past few days," said a doctor, Marc Bassil.

LINKING RIVERS-II

A Cure Worse Than The Disease? *Govt. intervention*

By KB SAHAY

5-6 12/7

The experience in other countries like the former USSR, China, the USA etc. with linking of rivers has been quite discouraging. According to experts in this group the maximum flow that LRP will be able to divert from the Ganga and Brahmaputra during the flood seasons would be hardly four and six per cent, respectively, and this will barely make a difference to the flood flow. The second group does not believe that LRP would be a generator of large quantities of surplus power as is being claimed by the proponents of the project.

No justification

The second group thinks that India's present water crisis is due mainly to mismanagement and lack of proper policies to use water from various sources and for various purposes and there is no valid justification for undertaking the LRP. In fact, the group believes that this project may lead to a situation when the cure would prove to be worse than the disease.

Measures like rain water harvesting, proper management of ground water, prevention of water pollution and stoppage of water wastage can go a long way in solving our water problem and the group believes that there is no need to resort to a drastic step like LRP which is grossly undesirable from any angle.

There is a third group which holds the view that the main cause of India's water crisis is that ever since Independence, governments have always pursued policies to increase the supply of water for meeting the demands of constructing dams and diversions and by promoting ground water extraction through electric or diesel pumps, showing little concern for moderating or optimising the demand factor. This exclusive-supply-side-hydrology adopted by the authorities has given rise to many serious problems like unsustainable exploitation of ground

water, waterlogging, salinisation and soil erosion in a very large part of our land area and submergence of forests and environmental damage by the dams which are now suffering badly due to high siltation rates.

Hence this group is stressing the need to redefine our water policy and change it from the

irrigation in India instead of the wasteful conventional system of irrigation.

Also, water scarce areas should not grow water intensive crops like sugarcane or paddy. The experts belonging to the demand side approach question the propriety of any inter-basin water transfer to "make the



supply-side-hydrology to a demand-side approach. This paradigm shift alone can solve our water problems and save India from the looming crisis.

Simply wasteful

For this we need to redesign our irrigation technology and crop pattern in tune with water availability because about 80 to 85 per cent of our total water requirement is for agriculture. And sadly the irrigation efficiency in India is as low as 25 to 35 per cent implying that about 65 to 75 per cent of water provided to the crop is simply wasteful.

The group advocates the use of drip-irrigation and micro-

desert bloom".

An overview of all the measures suggested by various experts from all the three groups as given above shows that the only real controversy is about the proposed inter-linking of the rivers while all other measures put forward by the various groups are, in fact, in no way contradictory to each other and hence could, nay must, be implemented to contain our alarming water crisis.

But what is most surprising and worrisome is that none of the experts from any of the three groups has advocated an effective and timely check on our population growth while all

concede that the main cause for the country's escalating water requirement is our rising population. About 85 to 90 per cent of our water demand is for agriculture and domestic purposes taken together and both these water demands for agriculture and domestic uses are almost directly proportional to the population.

Yet none of the groups — not even the votaries of the demand side approach — has asked for population control which alone can provide a sustainable solution to our water problem.

Most apathetic

It is amazing that the government is ready, even eager, to undertake a truly massive and Herculean project like LRP with all the ecological uncertainties and risks but is most apathetic towards population control knowing fully well that rising population is the root cause of our water crisis. The 10th Five Year Plan (2002-07) is a glaring example of this apathy, as it blatantly negates the objectives set in the National Population Policy adopted in 2000.

According to the National Population Policy, India's population is to be restricted to 1,119 million in 2011 while the 10th Plan stipulates to let it go up to 1,193 million by that time making it impossible to stabilise our population by 2045 as required by the National Population Policy.

Our experts and bureaucrats can suggest any and every method right from using a bucket instead of a shower for a bath; to rainwater harvesting; to micro-irrigation and to interlinking of rivers to solve the water crisis. But it cannot plead for controlling our burgeoning population effectively.

Unless we stop our population growth soon and start bringing it down there is no sustainable solution to India's water crisis.

(Concluded)

17 JUL 2013

LINKING RIVERS-I

Debate On Averting Water Famine

By KB SAHAY

5-8
11/7
Prompted by a Supreme Court judgment, the NDA government has set up a task force to give effect to the idea of linking the Indian rivers to solve the country's worsening water problem. This project to link our rivers is estimated to cost a huge 560,000 crore and is to be completed by the year 2016.

Public debate

This decision of the government taken at the instance of the apex court has thankfully led to, for the first time, a serious public debate on the country's biggest crisis in terms of its wide-ranging impact and implications, acute severity and spread. It is extremely encouraging to note that several ex-bureaucrats, activists, experts, politicians, journalists and editors are all debating the "link river project"; and naturally, in the process, the country's water problem is also getting analysed and debated as never before.

In fact, this kind of serious public debate on the country's impending water crisis ought to have started much earlier and not as late as now when the calamity is almost upon us. It is realised now by the authorities that "water precedes *roti, kapada aur makan*". The public debate triggered by the LRP on the water crisis which has put the livelihood of millions at risk is proceeding in broadly three directions.

One group is arguing that the

The author is Professor, Centre for Biomedical Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi

country must link the rivers to increase the availability of utilisable fresh water to solve our water crisis worsening year after year as our demand for water is increasing continuously. According to the latest estimates made by the National Commission for

1,580 million in 2050, the country's water requirement will amount to 1180 cu km per year and will thus exceed the annual availability of the utilisable water. But because of unequal distribution of water in the country and the massive pollution of the



Integrated Water Resources Development, the total annual renewable freshwater supply in the country is about 1950 cubic kilometre.

Unequal distribution

But out of this only 1100 cu km of water can be utilised if the Himalayan and peninsular rivers are to remain non-interlinked. It is also estimated that for an expected population of about

water bodies the water crisis will become catastrophic in many parts of the country much before 2050.

Our current water demand is estimated to be only around 800 cu km and yet about 30 per cent of our population are suffering acute water scarcity and distress. So with our increasing water requirement every year mainly due to our rising population, the water crisis will continue to wor-

sen in the coming years. To overcome this problem, the group argues, we must increase the availability of the utilisable water by linking the rivers. This measure will also help in preventing devastating floods that the Himalayan river basins experience every year.

Prime concern

Moreover for any government, the prime concern is — and rightly so — to avert, at any cost, the impending water famine and its dire consequences so that the government is not hauled up for inaction leading to a large scale calamity. But if in spite of interlinking the rivers, the calamity does not get averted — as the other groups are claiming — the government can at least save its skin by pleading that it did whatever was possible to do for averting the crisis.

Another group which is the most vocal one is of the view that LRP will solve neither the flood problem in the Ganga-Brahmaputra basins nor the water scarcity in the peninsular region to any significant extent. On the contrary, the project will create serious ecological, political and socio-economic problems with potentially grievous results for the country and its geography. The group thinks that LRP will amount to redrawing the geography of the country and altering the nature with horrendous ecological consequences. Moreover except for the Brahmaputra basin, no river basin in the country has any "excess" water to spare.

(To be concluded)

Heat wave, a worldwide phenomenon

By Our Special Correspondent
NEW DELHI, JULY 3. Indians were not alone when they recently passed through a season of searing heat wave conditions, with the temperatures peaking up to 49 per Celsius in several areas.

According to the World Meteorological Organisation, record high temperatures have also been reported from several other parts of the world this year.

The countries that suffered a stifling heat in recent months include Switzerland, the "paradise on earth". June this year was the hottest in the country in at least the past 250 years.

In Geneva, in particular, since May 29 the maximum day time temperatures did not drop below 25 degrees Celsius even for a day, making it the hottest June on record for the city.

In a press release here today, the international organisation also highlighted that several records in terms

of other extreme weather events such as tornados too were broken in recent months across the world.

In the U.S., for instance, new records were set both in terms of the number of tornados hitting the country in any month, and in terms of the unusual wet and cold conditions during May.

While the coastal areas were struck by a quick parade of 562 tornados, eastern and southeast parts of the country experienced an unusual spell of wet and cold conditions that prevailed for well over a month.

Warning that this was not the end as recent scientific assessments indicated that the number and intensity of extreme weather events might increase, the WMO said it was all because of continuing increase in global temperatures due to climate change.

Quoting recent assessments by the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change set up jointly by the WMO and

the United Nations Environment Programme, the WMO said the global average surface temperature was estimated to have increased by about 0.6 degrees Celsius over the 20th century, about 0.15 degrees Celsius larger than what has been estimated till now.

It said that new analyses of proxy data for the northern hemisphere indicated that increase in temperature in the 20th century was likely to have been the largest in any century during the past 1,000 years. In an apparent reference to frequent reports linking extreme events to the phenomena such as El Nino, the release emphasised that "the influence of El Nino and La Nina on these extreme events in general (still) undefined".

But it did not rule out such connections totally, stating that the WMO would continue to organise research to probe if there were any linkages in collaboration with research institutions across the world.

Coke stands accused of eco-poisoning

OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 28: Coca-Cola India today found itself mired in a crisis after a BBC report said the sludge produced at its factory in Kerala's Palakkad district contained dangerous chemicals that were polluting water supplies, the land and the food chain.

The sludge is the waste produced at the factory that the company provides free of cost to farmers in and around its plant at Plachimada village in Palakkad. The farm-

ers use it as fertiliser.

The report on BBC's Radio 4 programme *Face the Facts* said the sludge contained "dangerous levels of the known carcinogen cadmium". It said sludge samples from the plant had been tested at the University of Exeter which found unacceptably high levels of toxins, including cadmium and lead.

Cadmium is a carcinogen that can cause kidney failure while exposure to lead — especially among children — can cause mental retardation, severe anaemia and is potentially fatal. Coke, which has been swat-

ting away similar allegations in the local media for almost a year, is trying hard to face down the BBC report by arguing that it had independent reports that proved the chemicals were within permissible levels.

A top Coke official said the company would send a team there to examine the accusation.

Face the Facts presenter John Waite visited the plant following complaints from villagers that water supplies were drying up because the Coke plant was a guzzler. "The results have devastating consequences for those living near the areas where this wa-

site has been dumped and for the thousands who depend on crops produced in these fields," said John Henry, a leading toxicology expert and a consultant at St Mary's Hospital in London, who was interviewed by the BBC.

"What worries me about the levels found is how this might affect the pregnant women in this area. You would expect to see an increase in miscarriages, stillbirths and premature deliveries," Henry said.

Scientist David Santillo, who was involved in the investigation, says the contamination has spread to the water supply and is

well above the World Health Organisation (WHO) levels.

Coke officials said the plant was certified as conforming to the highest environment management standard — ISO 14001. "The plant at Palakkad is certified to ISO 14001 and is open to inspection by all regulatory and accredited monitoring agencies," the company's official spokesperson said.

ISO 14001 was first published in 1996 and specifies the actual requirements for an environmental management system.

Sunil Gupta, Coca-Cola India's vice-president, public af-

fairs and communications, said: "We will ensure our ongoing dialogue with local community leaders around the plant gets additional impetus and ensure their voices and concerns are better heard."

The official spokesperson said: "Independent studies from government agencies concerned with the environment and academic institutions have given our plant a clean bill of health. However, we take the concerns seriously and will continue to revalidate and recheck those existing studies with regulators and agencies and seek further

independent inputs to this environmental audit process."

Early this year, the local pan-chayat refused to renew the Coca-Cola licence, saying the plant was depleting ground water in the region. The licence was renewed after court intervention.

The issue has already taken on political overtones with the CPM launching an oust-Coke campaign in the region, threatening to intensify the agitation against Coke, rated the world's largest brand for the third year running in the latest Inter-brands-*Businessweek* survey of Best Global Brands.

E.U.-Bush spat on GM foods

BRUSSELS, JUNE 24. The European Union on Tuesday rejected a complaint from the U.S. President, George W. Bush, that the E.U.'s restrictions on genetically modified crops were hurting poor African farmers.

"It is false we are anti-biotechnology or anti-developing countries," said a E.U. spokesman. "These things said by the United States are simply not true."

On Monday, Mr. Bush criticised European restrictions on bio-engineered food, saying they were based on unfounded, unscientific health fears. "Because of these artificial obstacles, many African

nations avoid investing in biotechnology, worried that their products will be shut out of important European markets," Mr. Bush told a meeting of the Biotechnology Industry Association in Washington. "For the sake of a continent threatened by famine, I urge the European governments to end their opposition to biotechnology," he added.

U.S. farmers estimate that the E.U. biotech restrictions have cost them nearly \$300 millions a year in lost corn exports alone. The issue has soured the world's biggest trading relationship and will loom large at an E.U.-U.S. summit on Wednesday in

Washington.

The E.U. claimed it spent seven times more on development aid to Africa than the U.S. He said the E.U. focused its spending on longer term improvements to help African farmers improve their yields. U.S. officials have previously blamed the E.U. restrictions for decisions by African nations to reject American food aid because it contains genetically modified grain. The E.U. imposed a moratorium on the import of genetically modified food products in 1998, responding to mounting fears of European consumers about possible health risks from the products. — AP

E F I R O O

25 JUN 2003

GM for one, Frankenstein food for other

London, June 24 (Reuters): A transatlantic storm is brewing over genetically modified crops with the US extolling the benefits of biotechnology and Europeans insisting on proof that "Frankenstein foods" really are safe to eat.

In the latest salvo in what is turning into a bruising battle, President George W. Bush accused European nations of contributing to famine in Africa because of their reluctance to accept GM foods.

But critics in Europe said his comments are more about promoting the biotech business than ending world hunger.

"He can only have been informed by the multinationals, the Monsantos of this world, to make a statement which displays as much ignorance as that," Patrick Holden, of the environmental group the Soil Association, said.

Monsanto Co, the St. Louis, Missouri-based agribusiness giant, is moving to commercialise biotech wheat.

"It is nonsense," Holden added. "Even serious experts on GM will concede that there is no evidence that GM can make any greater contribution to feeding the world than existing agricultural science."

Friends of the Earth, echoed his comments and accused the US leader of exploiting famine to sell GM products.

"GM crops will not feed the world. Indeed making poor farmers dependent on biotech companies for their seed may only make matters worse," said spokeswoman Clare Oxborrow.

The debate about GM foods highlights huge differences between Americans, who seem to have accepted the technology in which plants are genetically al-

tered to repel insects and withstand drought and Europeans, who are more sceptical and less trusting of regulatory authorities after food scares such as the outbreak of mad cow disease.

Last week the Bush administration announced it would file a formal complaint with the World Trade Organisation to overturn a European ban on new biotech foods.

"If Bush thinks that getting his way with Europe over Iraq was a precedent for this GM decision, he should think again because the degree of informed public opposition to commercialisation is growing by the day," Holden said.

Proponents of GM technology say it will increase farm yields, lower costs, reduce the level of chemicals used on plants and help to feed a hungry world.

Critics warn that too little is known about health risks such as allergic reactions and resistance to antibiotics and that not enough testing has been done.

They are also concerned about the threat to the environment and that GM crops could contaminate other "natural" breeds. Environmentalists worry about the creation of so-called "super weeds" and the loss of biodiversity.

"No one really knows what the long-term impact of GM will be on our health or the environment," Friends of the Earth's Oxborrow said. "Consumers in Europe know this and have made it perfectly clear that they don't want to eat GM food."

Holden said Americans are more accepting of biotechnology because they have not been given information about it. "There has never been a proper public debate (on GM crops) in America," he said.

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Government

TRANSGENIC CROPS AND APPROVAL

NEWS THAT A second seed company has been officially permitted to carry out large-scale field trials of Bt Cotton may seem as if some momentum is being generated on the sluggish agro-biotechnology front. Far from it. By asking Rasi Seeds to conduct trials on one lakh acres in the southern and the central parts of the country, the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) has once again demonstrated a wearisome attitude of getting involved in issues that go beyond its principal mandate — that is, ensuring environmental safety. The Tamil Nadu-based company's RCH 2 Bt cotton uses the same gene (Cry1Ac) used by Mahyco in its transgenic cotton variety, which has been tested extensively for biosafety and been granted permission for commercialisation. If further trials must be conducted by Rasi Seeds, then these must be to settle issues that go beyond biosafety — possibly, the agronomic value or the economic viability of the new hybrids. Rather than allow the market to determine such issues, the GEAC has shown a tendency to get entangled with them. For instance, Mahyco's approval for commercialisation of Bt cotton was delayed by a whole year largely because of certain agronomic questions. And earlier this year, Mahyco's Mech 915 Bt cotton variety failed to win approval because of susceptibility to the leaf curl virus, a reason totally unconnected to Bt technology, which is meant to protect the cotton crop from only the bollworm.

One of the direct consequences of excessive red tapism and a tardy and unhelpful approval process has been the rampant and unchecked manufacture of unapproved Bt cotton seeds. Sale of such seeds has become so commonplace in Gujarat that illegal Bt cotton blooms in the cotton-growing regions of the State. It was two years ago that the manufacture and sale of illegal transgenic cotton seeds (Navbharat 151) came to official notice. Ironically, all that has resulted from promises of launching a search and destroy operation against this single varia-

nt is the proliferation of vast numbers of Bt hybrids, which now dot Gujarat's cottonscape. The GEAC's declaration that it will bring this to the attention of the State Government is akin to closing the stable door after the horse has bolted. The most effective way of shutting out the illegal (and potentially dangerous) manufacture of transgenic seeds is to ensure that the regulatory process works quickly, effectively and transparently and the GEAC, a widely-represented body under the Environment Ministry, has not performed satisfactorily on any of these counts.

Given its track record, the GEAC's decision on the Rasi Seeds hybrids was not unexpected. But another piece of news from the biotechnology front was, to say the least, very surprising. The announcement by the Secretary of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) that a genetically modified potato, which contains more protein and other essential nutrients, will receive approval in six months has raised many eyebrows. With the final approving authority, namely the GEAC, not even having been approached yet, the so-called 'prorato' is nowhere even near reaching the final stages of regulatory approval. The transgenic potato, which has been developed by a team of Indian scientists by importing a gene from the amaranth plant, has already completed over two years of limited field trials. Although the results are reported to be extremely encouraging, suggesting that the nutritionally enhanced potato will start supplementing the diet of India's poor by early next year, it implies an extremely speedy schedule of evaluation on toxicological, nutritional, allergenicity and other fronts. Approval within such a time-frame would also mean short-circuiting the large-scale field trials and on what ground these may be done away with is not clear. In the absence of specific clarifications, it is impossible to predict whether the prorato will be on Indian dining tables as quickly as the head of the DBT suggested.

Medha, Dy CM row ends in her arrest

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BHOPAL, MAY 20

ACTIVISTS of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) led by Medha Patkar today laid siege to the residence of Madhya Pradesh Deputy CM Subhash Yadav, who also heads the Narmada Valley Development Authority in the state, for most of the day on Tuesday.

The activists had gone to Yadav's house to "challenge and caution" the state on its recent decision to raise the height of the Sardar Sarovar by another five metres but following his remarks, Medha sat on a 24-hour fast in protest. She was arrested for trespassing around 6 pm. She had earlier threatened to go on a fast unto death if police attempted to



Medha Patkar with Subhash Yadav in Bhopal. Raj Patidar

evict her forcibly. The drama began around 9 am, as a result the entire district administration was stationed at the Deputy CM's house for the day. The activists had gone to meet Subhash Yadav and were waiting outside his house. Though the two sides offer conflicting versions of what followed, there is no

dispute over the tone and tenor of Yadav's remarks against Patkar.

NBA activists said as soon as Yadav emerged from his house in the morning, he headed for his office without meeting them. Yadav said he asked NBA activists to accompany him. He claimed he even sat on the road to talk to them but they were only interested in raising slogans against him.

Yadav then made several statements about Medha Patkar, which he repeated while talking to journalists, alleging she was only interested in media publicity and should direct her remarks to the camera. "These people are responsible for the power problem in the state. She is only interested in publicity and international awards. She wants to build her international image, show that no one is a bigger environmentalist

than her. They think *akele thekedar yahn hain* (they believe they are the only ones concerned). *Ye bolhi jab hai, jab media ka focus hota hai* (She speaks only when the media focuses on her). *Nau saal se jhel rahan hui* (I have been putting up with it for nine years)." Told that Patkar had sat down on a fast in the May sun to protest such remarks and would not even take water for 24 hours, he said: "*Isse paani pila kaurn raha hai* (Who is offering her water?)"

He then went on to defend the government's record regarding resettlement, claiming that every effort had been made.

Yadav ended up a sorry figure when he agreed to meet other NBA representatives in the evening. Speaker after speaker punctured his claims and left him with no answers.

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To keep the *Eminent* relationship going ✓

Without effective capacity-building, the millennium development goals will never be achieved. This critical water-development process is often treated as an add-on to programmes, with scant regard to local capacity-building institutions, or to long-term commitment. Capacity building is a process that must be sustained and financed for the long-term and undertaken in a holistic and integrated manner and therefore a new global strategy for capacity building needs to be developed...

The project of IFNet global flood warning system... will promote future exchange of information, experience, technical knowledge and future plans for national and international cooperation for action. The project is prospected to raise public awareness of floods and vastly improve flood counter measures from reactive to proactive actions worldwide.

...The existing gap between developing and developed counties in using communication technologies can be reduced by documenting successful capacity building cases and support the ongoing initiatives to promote distance and e-learning programmes.

Recommendations: Mechanism should be established to support and enhance exchange of regional experiences. ...Capacity building actions should be structurally incorporated in all water programmes, while international, regional and local capacity building centres should be

Extracts from the final report of the third World Water Forum, organized by the United Nations Development Programme, Kyoto, Japan, March 16-23, 2003

equipped to provide guidance in the process. To ensure sustainability of the above and new actions, a much larger financial investment must be made on a global scale.



Better understanding

Key issues: The objects of the world heritages registered by the UNESCO are of various ranges, all of which have a close relation with water. However, very few people realize the...relation... There is an urgent need to search and adopt new ways to preserve world heritages and perceive their great relation

to water.

Actions: Grasp the situations of the various heritages around the world that have close relation with water, and to discuss the best water management practices for protecting the world inheritance.

Recommendations: The construction of a database concerning world heritages related to water..., to take appropriate actions to tackle over the relation between water and heritages. Promoting public awareness and appropriate water management is very important to protect world heritages from disasters.

Key issues: If a sustainable use of groundwater is not reached, groundwater development will undoubtedly prolong the negative impacts on groundwater-fed wetlands and their ecosystem. In many regions of the world, especially in arid and semi-arid countries, it is an important challenge to develop compatible guidelines for rendering groundwater intensive use.

...Introducing the concepts and importance of groundwater to citizen and children, especially in rural and isolated areas, is recognized as a challenge. The aim is to understand and recognize the role of groundwater in environmental problems near city.

Trans-boundary aquifer resources management lack legal and institutional aspects. The main existing international law only applies to shared aquifers connected to surface water.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Clearance for raising Narmada dam height

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, MAY 14. The Narmada Control Authority today gave its clearance for raising the height of the controversial Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat from the present 95 metres to 100 metres (plus three metre humps), enlarging the area and habitations under submergence this monsoon season. The permission comes a year after the Gujarat Government was allowed to raise the height to 95 metres (plus three metre humps) before the Assembly elections last year.

When contacted over telephone in a remote village in the Narmada Valley, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) leader, Medha Patkar, lashed out against the decision saying it spelt "disaster, destruction and human tragedy" for thousands of tribals and villagers in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra who would face temporary and permanent submergence this monsoon.

"Just last night the Maharashtra Government took us to show some land in a hilly

region, how can they then claim that they have settled affected people. Even in Madhya Pradesh nothing has happened. Only a handful of landless people have been shifted to house plots. The landed have not moved as they are being offered cash. Gujarat has shown ex-parte allotment, only on paper. How can the NCA accept this? This is a clear violation of the Supreme Court order and the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award. It seems Governments have now stopped caring for people," she said.

The decision to increase the height was taken at the 66th Emergency Meeting of the NCA here chaired by the Water Resources Secretary and NCA chairman, A.K. Goswami. The Secretary, Social Justice and Empowerment, Gopal Reddy, who heads the Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R and R) Sub-Group, also attended.

Even while Maharashtra has to complete the mandatory rehabilitation and resettlement of displaced people, the Sub-Group in its meeting on Tuesday accepted the State's "undertaking" to do so before the monsoon

and recommended to the NCA to permit raising the height of the dam to 100 metres. It, however, directed the State Government concerned to make contingency arrangements to "safeguard" the project-affected families against any "untoward" incident during the flood season.

The R and R Sub-Group asked the Maharashtra Government to shift all project-affected families settled in temporary shelters to R and R sites well before the monsoon. The State was also directed to look into the grievances of the previously settled families and redress them.

Madhya Pradesh said it had resettled nearly 3,700 families from 51 villages, partly in Gujarat. After claiming that it had no land to rehabilitate a total of more than 33,000 families who would be displaced, the State has moved for giving cash compensation.

As per a Supreme Court Order and the NWDT award, oustees must be resettled and rehabilitated six months before raising the height of the dam with land for land compensation.

Dump for a dump, from India to US

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, April 16. — In the first ever case of "reverse dumping", 1,416 drums filled with 290 tonne of hazardous mercury wastes from a thermometer factory at Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu are being sent back to the USA.

The largest hazardous waste transfer from India marks the end of a long struggle by local people and environmental activists led by Greenpeace India.

They had alleged that mercury vapours released from the factory owned by Hindustan Lever Ltd — a subsidiary of the multi-national Unilever — ruined the health of

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USA
Environment
the workers and community and caused lasting damage to the environment during its 18 years of operation. HLL has at last arranged to ship the hazardous mercury and related wastes from its now defunct thermometer factory in Kodaikanal back to the USA. The consignment, including glass cutlets, finished and semi-finished products and sludge is leaving the Tuticorin port tomorrow aboard the ship Indmax Dalian. The shipment is heading to the hazardous waste recycling firm, Bethlehem Apparatus, in Pennsylvania, a Greenpeace official said.

The controversial thermometer factory was transplanted in India in 1983 after

it was shut down in Watertown, New York.

The factory imported all its mercury, primarily from the USA, and finished thermometers were exported back to the USA for distribution to markets abroad.

Environmental groups had alleged that the factory had been responsible for considerable mercury contamination over the last 18 years. Contamination levels outside the factory were measured at 600-800 times permissible limits but HLL had been denying this figure. On 7 March 2001, Greenpeace and a local environment group — Palani Hills Conservation Council exposed mercury bearing waste glass

dumped by the company at a local scrap yard. Demonstrations by local people at the factory site forced its closure by the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board.

The Board discovered that 10 tonne of mercury were unaccounted for and has been lost to the environment in addition to the amount of 559 kg the company had admitted. It also found that HLL workers were exposed to unacceptable mercury vapour levels leading to bleeding gums, skin patches, eye irritations. Mercury from the factory adversely impacted on the tropical forest of the Pambar Shola where it is located and contaminated the nearby Kodi Lake.

THE STATESMAN

17 APR 2003

Narmada floods Kutch with joy

TIMES NEWS NETWORK 19/5

Bhuj/Ahmedabad: Inhabitants of Kutch allowed themselves to be swept away by a flood of emotions on Sunday as waters of the Narmada started flowing into this semi-arid region of Gujarat, 600 km away from the Sardar Sarovar dam.

State water supply minister Narottam Patel said more than 3,000 of the 5,800 villages of Saurashtra and Kutch would soon reap the benefits of the project, on which the state government has so far spent Rs 1,000 crore. In the first phase, water will be provided to 70 villages of Bhachau and Rapar taluka.

For Vanita Trikam of Adhoi village—and many others like her—the daily ritual of undertaking a

back-breaking trek with pitchers on her head may soon be history.

While Vanita could not hide her glee on seeing running water for the first time in her life, Rava Dhira Ahir of Jangi village, after tasting sweet water for the first time ever, said, “*Bo saru lage chhe* (It tastes very nice).” They reflected the joy of the people of this parched region who have waited for more than half-a-century for this day. It was not surprising that they broke out into a song and dance on Sunday.

“There is a festival-like atmosphere in the rural areas,” said Pravin Bhatt, an advocate from Jamnagar.

In Samakhiyali, the BJP government attempted to attach some religious significance to the event by

creating a huge image of Lord Shiva, from whose ‘jata’ (locks of hair), the water flowed into the canal.

In Jamnagar, overjoyed at the Narmada waters reaching her city, social worker Rajshri Jani said, “For us it is a dream come true; it is nothing short of a miracle.”

The Jamnagar Municipal Corporation has started supplying water received from the Narmada for 25 minutes every alternate day. Earlier, water would be supplied once in three days.

With the arrival of the Narmada waters, the municipal corporations of Rajkot, Junagadh and Jamnagar have been forced to create a new network of pipelines.

● Medha raps MP, Maharashtra, Page 3

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Handwritten notes: "Srinivasan" and "19/8" with arrows pointing to the title.

'River grid project will lead to new inter-State disputes'

Handwritten notes: "18/5" and a checkmark.

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, MAY 17. The rivers interlinking project will generate a whole new set of inter-State disputes even as long-standing inter-basin disputes such as the Cauvery and Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal remained unresolved, a group of intellectuals observed here today at a 'Citizens Meeting'.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan leader, Medha Patkar, the former High Commissioner, L.C. Jain, the former Water Resources Secretary, Ramaswamy Iyer, and the water expert, Himanshu Thakkar, attended the meeting, among others.

The meeting urged the Government to take people into confidence and urged it to put the feasibility reports of various links in the public domain. It sought details on the source of funding and the socio-economic and ecological costs of the estimated Rs. 560,000-crore project.

Mr. Jain questioned the "legitimacy" given to the proposal by the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. He questioned the knowledge base of the Supreme Court on which it decided that rivers be interlinked in 10 years. He wanted to know whether the natural resources the project would consume could ever be reproduced. "Citizens need drinking water 10 times a day, not in 10 years from now."

His opposition was primarily on the ground that though the project claimed to solve the water problem of drought-prone areas, two-thirds of such geographical area would remain uncovered and would have to be augmented by local water harvesting programmes. "Not even the worst of governments can be so insensitive to promise

something so prima facie absurd in terms of fulfilling the objective for which public opinion is solicited."

Ms. Patkar said the project was an example of how the system could be used to subvert as in Iraq and in Gujarat. "The Government proposes to sign contracts for eight links on which no details are available. There is no project plan nor is there a financial plan nor a comprehensive plan for the social and environment impact of interlinking rivers. Not just a task force for interlinking rivers but a contractors force is being raised." She said the issue about "zamin, jungle, paani (land, forest and water) and human beings" was so serious that people's organisations, intellec-

tuals and civil society should speak up. "This whole connection is not only being overlooked but is ridiculed and the Government is going ahead with its plan in these two election years.

Whether it is the question of drinking water, displacement, floods, drought, farmers or fishermen — will it really solve the problems or worsen them. Whatever little surface or ground water remains in the hands of people and is accessible to them is being snatched. This has to be challenged by the tribal and riverine populations, who would be the prime targets. Mr. Suresh Prabhu as Task Force Chairman, who is giving face to this abstract project, must come face to face with the

people," she said.

Stressing people's right to information, Ms. Patkar said to start with, there was no information and later the project would become "fait accompli" on the pretext that some amount had been spent on it, as it happened in the Sardar Sarovar Project.

"By the time the project is implemented, its cost would increase manifold and not even the World Bank and the ADB would be able to fund it and multi-nationals and anti-national agencies would step in." Mr. Iyer said the Constitution did not mention intra-basin transfers.

He said even long-standing inter-basin disputes were unresolved. "If consensus was worked out on quid pro quo inducements or political compromises how lasting would those be. If the only principle that'll work would be money then it'd be dangerous and would have implications on international treaties with neighbouring countries," he said.

The environmentalist, Shekhar Singh, said interlinking rivers with different biological, chemical contents and ecosystems was like linking blood vessels without checking the blood group.

The meeting, organised by the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People, Toxics Link and Ecological Foundation, decided to convene similar meetings in parts of the country to generate awareness. It also decided to bring together various social groups working in the sector on a common platform.

It said that drinking water was a local issue and could be tackled with water harvesting projects and changes in cropping pattern.

'Where is the project located?'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 17. The Annual Report of the Ministry of Water Resources, which was recently tabled in Parliament, makes no mention of the ambitious river grid project estimated to cost Rs. 560,000 crores for 30 links.

This was mentioned by the former Planning Commissioner member and High Commissioner, L.C. Jain, while participating in a Citizens Meeting here today on the proposal to link rivers.

Mr. Jain said the report dated March 2003 neither mentioned the interlinking of rivers nor the constitution of a task force headed by Suresh Prabhu, nor of any finances linked with the project. The Task Force was set up in December 2002.

"Where is the project located? In the PMO? It is not part of the plan; does not seem to be part of the Government, at least not of the plan," he said.

"Keep your vessels out for Ganges waters.

But water may not come," was his message to the people of Tamil Nadu, who are said to have kept their vessels ready for receiving Ganges waters through the interlinking project.

WHO issues global warning

THOMAS H. MAUGH
HONGKONG, MARCH 16

THE World Health Organisation on Saturday issued a rare emergency advisory cautioning travellers and airline employees to be on the alert for a severe form of pneumonia that has killed at least nine people and hospitalised hundreds of others, particularly in the Far East.

The advisory did not call for a halt in travel, but warned travellers to be alert for symptoms of the disease and to seek treatment immediately if they become apparent. "We want people to be aware that if they have symptoms, they should go to a doctor," said WHO's Christine McNab.

WHO said it has detected 150 new cases of the disease — which it is calling severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS — and expressed alarm at the speed with which it is spreading. Two deaths and several cases of SARS were reported in Canada last week, and on Saturday, a Sin-

PNEUMONIA SCARE



A pneumonia patient being taken into a ward at Prince of Wales Hospital in Hong Kong on Sunday. Reuters

ported that another traveller, returning from Asia, had fallen ill aboard a flight from Atlanta to Canada. "SARS is now a worldwide health threat," said Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, WHO's director general. Officials stressed that there is no evidence linking the outbreak to terrorism.

"The emergence of two clusters of this illness on the North American continent indicates the potential for travellers who have been in the affected areas of Asia to have been exposed to this syndrome," said Dr. Julie Gerberding, CDC director. "Therefore, we are instituting measures aimed at identifying potential cases among travellers returning to the US and protecting people with whom they may have come in contact."

Both WHO and CDC have sent teams of disease experts and other physicians to southeast Asia to help identify the cause of the outbreak and to assist in control efforts. The agencies are also sending masks, gowns, gloves, goggles and other hospital equipment to medical facilities to help break the transmission chain. —LATYP

gaporean physician travelling from New York was hospitalised in Frankfurt, Germany, after falling ill on his flight.

Others on the flight were quarantined in Germany. Late on Saturday, it was re-

'Burning of oil wells a threat to environment'

no-12
3/1/3

By Aarti Dhar

NEW DELHI, MARCH 30. The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) will approach the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to study the impact of the ongoing war in Iraq on that country's environment. The UNEP has already announced that it would document the extent of environmental damage caused by the war.

The director-general of TERI, R.K. Pachauri, told *The Hindu* here today that the study would be worthwhile as it could help in preventing future wars. However, it might be a few weeks before the war's impact on the environment starts showing. The greatest threat to the environment was from the burning of oil wells and from chemicals released during bombing.

"The extent of damage to environment will ultimately depend on the duration of the war and the number of oil wells set on fire," Dr. Pachauri said. The longer the oil wells burnt, the higher would be the quantity of harmful gases such as sulphur, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide emitted into the air. "However, it is the unburnt or partially burnt hydrocarbons that hang in the air in the form of particles that act as most harmful pollutants and attack the respiratory system," he added.

The chemicals released from the bombs also polluted the atmosphere. "Of course, the Napalm bombs used in the Vietnam war were defoliants (destroying vegetation), but these bombs are not being used in Iraq. But then, we really do

not know the exact kinds of bombs being used and the chemicals released from them,"

Dr. Pachauri said adding that reports suggested that only conventional bombs were being used. Then much would depend on the direction of winds. If the winds blew away the gaseous and particulate emissions to nearby areas, the harmful effects on Iraq would be reduced. If they hang over the war zone, the health of the people would be affected. "As it is the people are facing a shortage of food and water there. Epidemics are not far away in such a situation," he said. Another area of concern is the psychological impact of war on the people as well as on the U.S. and British soldiers who are fighting in an alien land and under difficult conditions

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AP

'Kerosene lake' poses threat

ALMATY (KAZAKHSTAN): Kazakh ecologists have warned of what they call a looming environmental catastrophe as an underground lake of kerosene seeps toward the Irtysh river, which runs through Siberia and feeds into the mighty Ob. The lake was formed in the mid-1970s from a leak in a fuel station at a military air base near Semipalatinsk, now known as Semey, a town in eastern Kazakhstan where the Soviet Union had its largest testing ground for nuclear weapons. It contains approximately

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6400 tonnes of kerosene and covers some 400,000 square metres, according to environmental experts. The lake is moving toward the Irtysh, and is about 200 metres from the river, experts say. "This will be an ecological catastrophe, not just on a local but on a universal scale," Vladimir Tyurin, the chief specialist of the Semey city administration, said. "Flora and fauna will die off, and a whole series of cities will be left without drinking water". An adviser at the Environment Ministry said the kerosene might already be seeping into the river. — AP

THE HINDU

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WATER SOLUTIONS

Environment
HD-10

THERE IS HOPE and despair in meeting the human need for water; this is the message from the third meeting of the World Water Forum which was held in Kyoto last week. There have been local, national and international exercises, which have proved successful in harnessing water for direct and indirect consumption. But these are as yet too few to make a difference to the direction of a larger trend, which is one of a spreading water stress in the world. The third WWF meeting, organised by the World Water Council (a forum which counts among its members U.N. agencies and civil society organisations) heard both messages from participants from more than 160 countries. But despite the welter of promises made in Kyoto by government and non-government agencies, the larger message is one of the world falling back in solving the water problem. Compare the situation at the time of the first and second WWF meetings in 1997 and 2000 with that in 2003 and the conclusion cannot be otherwise. Too little is being done to follow up words with successful action on the ground.

The meetings in Japan heard experts project that the demand for water is increasing three times faster than the global growth in population. The WWF conference was also presented with a gloomy prediction that the population experiencing water stress would rise from 450 million today to as many as 2.7 billion people, or a third of the world's population, by 2025. But both these are business-as-usual projections, which assume that the norms of water extraction and consumption will continue as before and cannot be changed. This need not be so. Consider, for example, the cliché of a doomsday prediction that the wars of the 21st century will be fought over water, not oil. Yet, as the WWF conference was informed, a resolution of international water disputes has been the rule rather than the exception over the past half-century. Violence between countries has erupted in 37 instances but as many as 200 bilateral and multilateral treaties on a sharing of waters have been signed. A notable example has

been the Indus Water Treaty that has been adhered to by India and Pakistan through two open wars and decades of tension. But there is no denying the existence of a multifaceted problem in water. One facet is that the world still has 1.2 billion people who do not have access to drinking water, while there are 2.4 billion people who have to make do without proper sanitation. Another facet of the water crisis is that sources of freshwater are drying up around the world, while pollution is damaging many others. The problem is, however, that the dominant approach — worldwide — to tackling the crisis in water is essentially one of augmenting supplies without any attention being paid to forms of use of water. It is not a new set of observations but the discussions at the WWF meet highlighted three sets of practices which have blighted national efforts to tackle the water crisis. Inefficient and wasteful use of water in agriculture, industry and homes (the latter more common in the advanced countries) is one of them. The second is the pollution of water sources. The third is unsustainable extraction of groundwater resources. Action on all these fronts supplemented by exploitation, storage and transport of water will provide the solution, instead of the pure supply-side approach to 'production' of water that continues to rule national programmes, especially in developing countries.

A bouquet of solutions that was suggested at the WWF meet included improved governance in management of water resources, capacity building and additional financing for water projects in the poorer countries of the world. These are unexceptional suggestions to operationalise a different approach to solving the world's water problems. What is needed and is yet to be accepted is that be it in crop cultivation, industrial production or residential consumption only an integrated approach that combines improved efficiency in water use with augmented supplies will tackle deficits and prevent disputes between communities, regions and nations. A pure supply-side approach only aggravates both sets of problems.

THE HINDU

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Interlinking of rivers — II

By A. Vaidyanathan

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ENTHUSIASTS OF interlinking of rivers tend to be dismissive of the concerns over the environmental and human consequences of the project. They claim that these fears are vastly exaggerated or argue that they are unavoidable costs of "development" and that they should not be allowed to hold back the project. One has to be extraordinarily insensitive not to recognise the consequences of ignoring these aspects in our water resource planning in the past. They are reflected in the callous manner in which displaced persons have been treated, land degradation due to misuse of water, depletion of groundwater and the growing pollution of water sources. The experience of the Indira Gandhi Canal is a stark example of the problems arising in the wake of bringing in vast amounts of water without adequate understanding of and concern for its impact on the fragile desert ecology.

There are also good reasons to be sceptical about the state of preparation for the interlinking projects. Anyone familiar with the planning of projects such as Bhakra Nangal and Sardar Sarovar knows that the detailed investigations and site surveys preparatory to the design and the analyses and studies needed for the actual design take many years of intensive effort and expense by a large body of experts in diverse fields. A mega project of such complexity as interlinking of rivers calls for preparatory work of far, far greater dimensions. Moreover, the quality of preparatory investigations and surveys for many, if not most, of the irrigation and water resource projects leave much to be desired. Inadequate investigations, changes in scope and design, huge cost escalations and inordinate delays in completing projects are all-too-familiar features of irrigation planning in the recent decades.

Under these circumstances, it is difficult to believe that the interlinking programme has been worked out in sufficient detail to qualify for serious examination, leave alone immediate implementation. The best way to counter this scepticism is to make all the studies, analyses and reports available for public scrutiny.

There is little authenticated infor-

mation on the likely cost of the programme and its various component projects. Figures as high as Rs. 5,600 billion are mentioned but no details are available. This is about 50 times the total allocation for the ongoing water resource development projects in the Tenth Plan.

In a situation of severe resource scarcity, the question of the relative priorities to be accorded to the im-

provement of existing facilities and the expeditious completion of viable projects on hand as against mega projects based on questionable premises is particularly relevant. This issue ought to be debated seriously. Questions about the sources of funds for interlinking tend to be dismissed cavalierly. The notion that private sources can be attracted is the height of naivete and wishful thinking. A Government already saddled with huge public debt, and whose precarious fiscal situation continues to deteriorate rapidly, can hardly expect the financial institutions to fork out such large sums for a programme, the content and economic viability of which have not been assessed.

There are also important institutional and legal issues to be sorted out. There is no provision for any mechanism to deal with matters concerning inter-basin transfers. The Centre has no legal authority to decide on this and no State will agree to vest the authority with the Centre. There is talk of deciding these matters through consultation and consensus among the States. One can hardly take this seriously, given our experience with the working of existing laws and procedures for dealing with water allocation between the States within the same basin. The allocation of water among riparian States even within a single river basin has so far been determined by law through negotiated legal agreements and treaties, and by judicial and qua-

si-judicial mechanisms such as tribunals. We know from experience how contentious, prolonged and difficult this process is. The awards themselves have so far been accepted as binding on all the States concerned and the Centre. But the implementation of these awards has given rise to innumerable inter-State conflicts, which the Centre, despite the powers given to it under the law and its fi-

nancial clout, has been unable to prevent or settle. These disputes and conflicts are the subject of numerous litigations. The courts have been cautious in dealing with these cases and have instead suggested that they be settled through mutual discussion, arbitration, Central mediation and other extra-judicial mechanisms. This caution is both wise and understandable, given the complexity of the issues involved and the fact that courts have no means to enforce the judgments and the record of compliance by Governments is at best mixed. No judgment or award can satisfy all the interested parties. Indeed, of late, the States are pleading their inability to enforce court judgments on grounds that they are unfair and likely to cause unmanageable law and order problems. Instances of Governments condoning blatant violations of their own rules regarding allocation of uses of water and acquiescing or even permitting the violation of established rules regarding the rights of access and use are distressingly widespread.

These questions are pertinent and basic to a considered assessment of the river-linking programme. In the absence of satisfactory answers, criticisms of the decision to go ahead with the implementation of the project are reasonable and legitimate. The current discussions in the media and on public forums hardly focus on these issues, much less help allay the apprehensions. That would call

for a serious, open and informed debate based on facts and analyses. Regrettably, apart from a few sketch maps purported to be taken from the Hashim Commission report, very little information on the specific schemes envisaged, details of their design, environmental impact, displacement, and likely costs and benefits is available in the public domain.

Even the main report of the Commission, though claimed to be a priced publication, cannot be obtained from either the Ministry or the Publications Division. The annexure to the report, in which the details have reportedly been discussed, are considered secret.

Time was when the opinions of the Government's irrigation establishment were accepted without much question. Times have changed. There is much greater awareness now that there is more, much more to water resource development than constructing dams and canals, that the process of scrutiny and appraisal is at once too narrow, too lax and too secretive, and that there is now a sizeable body of knowledge and expertise on water resource management outside the Government. The assessments of the engineering establishments are no longer taken as beyond challenge. Hardly anyone takes seriously, much less accepts, the claim that "the National Perspective Plan (linking rivers) has been drawn up by a scientific and professional organisation, conceptually and technically upheld by the Technical Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Water Resources, the Central Water Commission and the National Commission on Integrated Water Resources Development Plan..." and that "...the studies have been ratified by engineers, sociologists and economists". If this is so, why should the details of these studies and appraisals be a closely-held secret, instead of being made public to facilitate informed discussion?

The least that Suresh Prabhu, head of the task force on interlinking rivers, can do is to make all the relevant reports and documents available to the public and provide an opportunity for various interested "stake holders" to voice their concerns.

(Concluded)

2 MAR 2018

Interlinking of rivers — I

By A. Vaidyanathan

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THE CONCEPT of interlinking rivers is evidently appealing to considerable sections of the general public and to policy-makers. More than three decades ago, K. L. Rao proposed the linking of the Ganga and the Cauvery. It was followed by Dastur's plan for a garden canal, linking all the major rivers in the country. Both the proposals attracted considerable attention. But due to widespread criticism of their feasibility, desirability and viability, these were shelved.

In the 1990s, the Government appointed a Commission to examine the strategy of water resource development, including the possibility of interlinking rivers. Its report — which is not available to the public — is understood to have given cautious support, subject to a careful examination of all relevant aspects, to the idea of link canals to divert surplus waters from some selected rivers to the water-short basins and regions.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court, on a public interest litigation, directed the Centre to draw up and implement by 2015 a programme to interlink major rivers. Subsequently, the Prime Minister announced the Government's decision to act on the court directive and appointed a task force to ensure the implementation of the project by 2015. The task force headed by Suresh Prabhu is now active.

The popular appeal of interlinking rivers is based on the understanding that an enormous amount of water of our rivers flows into the sea and that if only this is prevented, and water transferred from water-abundant rivers to water-deficit areas, there will be adequate supply for everyone in every part of the country. At another level, the project is seen as promoting national integration and a fair sharing of the country's natural water wealth. Both these presumptions are far too simplistic.

Whether the linking of rivers will promote integration or generate more disputes and tensions is a moot question. Besides, several obvious, but *prima facie* important, questions about the concept, and the feasibility, desirability and viability of the proposal need to be clarified before its implementation can be considered serious-

ly. The belief that interlinking is necessary to ensure adequate and safe water supply to everyone and everywhere is wholly misplaced. Domestic use currently accounts for a mere five per cent of the total use of water harnessed through canals, tanks, wells and tube-wells.

The requirements are no doubt growing rapidly but will still be relatively small compared to those of other uses. Interlinking is hardly justified

irrigation during the *kharif* season. Practically everywhere, including the northwest, irrigation is essential between November and June. So far, these imbalances have been met by constructing storages to store monsoon surpluses for use in the dry season and by exploiting groundwater. Some areas, such as Tamil Nadu, have exhausted the potential for harnessing the surface flows. In several others, the possibilities for constructing

total flow occurring during these months may be somewhat smaller but not all that much smaller. For instance, over 80 per cent of the annual flow in the Kosi is between May and November; and almost three fourths between June and October.

The monsoon happens to be the season when rainfall in the aggregate is adequate for crop growth. Of course in some regions, such as Rajasthan and parts of Gujarat and the Deccan, even the *kharif* rain is far too low and variable for productive agriculture. In some others, more water could help switch to more productive crop patterns. These "deficit" regions are far from those considered "surplus" requiring transport over very difficult terrain and long distances.

Moreover, since the surplus occurs in the rainy season and the demand is in the dry season, it is not enough to merely carry the water from one point to another. Large storages will be necessary. One needs to know the quantum of water to be stored, and whether and where potential sites on the required scale are available, and their likely impact on environment and human displacement.

All we have to go by are some maps published in the media, purportedly from the Hashim Report, indicating from which rivers and at which locations surpluses will be diverted and to which river(s), and at what points in these rivers the diverted water will be taken. There is no information on the quantum of water to be transferred through different link canals; the extent and location of the area to be benefited at the receiving end; and the distribution system through which water is to be distributed to this area.

The maps and the sketchy accounts in the media and official pronouncements tell us little on these aspects. If these maps accurately reflect the concept of the interlinking projects sought to be implemented, it will only mean that instead of the surplus flows flowing to the Bay of Bengal via the Ganges and the Brahmaputra and the Mahanadi, they will flow to the sea through the Krishna, the Godavari, the Pennar or wherever!

(The writer is Professor Emeritus, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai.)

The belief that interlinking is necessary to ensure adequate and safe water supply to everyone and everywhere is wholly misplaced.

as the solution for this problem. Even if interlinking were justified for other reasons, it will not be possible to reach the water to all the habitations without huge investments in a centralised distribution network. Decentralised local rain-water harvesting, by reviving and improving traditional techniques, can meet essential requirements for domestic purposes more effectively and at a far lesser cost.

By far, the largest user of harnessed water is agriculture. Currently, more than 85 per cent of water from canals, tanks and wells and tube-wells is used for irrigation. The demand on this account is growing and will continue to be, by far, the biggest claimant on available supplies. There is much scope for increasing the efficiency of the irrigation systems in place by reducing waste and through better water management. Measures needed for this purpose — by way of investment in physical improvements and institutional reform — are not receiving due attention.

The need for irrigation arises in regions and seasons when rainfall is inadequate for raising crops and obtaining optimum yields. The total rainfall is adequate to meet crop water requirements in the *kharif* season over large parts of the country. Irrigation is required essentially to tide over inadequate soil moisture during dry spells within the season. There are, of course, some areas — especially in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, parts of Gujarat, Tamil Nadu — which need

storage are limited. Groundwater resources are already under a severe stress. The scope for expansion is limited. In many areas, the problem is to check expansion and contain the rate of exploitation. It is in this context that interlinking is seen as a way out.

A closer examination of the interlinking idea raises several questions: First, it is based on the presumption that there are large surplus flows in some basins and that the physical transfer is feasible in terms of physical engineering, and can be accomplished economically without creating any adverse impact.

On what basis and who determines the surplus basins and the magnitude of the surplus? The volume of flows during the flood season is misleading as a basis for judging surpluses. Nor can the regions where floods occur be considered water surplus. Most of them may have floods in the monsoon but have inadequate water for use in the dry season. Substantial tracts in these regions do not have the benefit of irrigation. Estimates of surplus made by Central agencies such as the National Water Development Agency are hotly contested by the States.

A more serious difficulty arises from the fact that most of the flow in practically all rivers occurs during the southwest monsoon. Published data from official sources show that 90 per cent of the flow in south Indian rivers occurs between May and November. Data on the Indo-Gangetic and Brahmaputra river basins are classified. Being perennial, the proportion of the

CELESTIAL

16 MAR 2003

World water forum ends with focus on climate theme

By G. Venkataramani

KYOTO MARCH 23. Over a hundred new commitments on water, with focus on the climate theme and gender issues, were made on the concluding day of the third World Water Forum, here today. "The forum has become a truly 'action-oriented' conference," said its Vice-Secretary General, Kenzo Hiroki.

"Water issues are of long-term nature; all institutions and decision-makers must take this seriously. The poor come first and poverty eradication is foremost on the agenda," said Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, president of the World Water Council and the Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, Egypt.

World water infrastructures, especially those in developing countries, are in a

dire need for renewal, expansion and upgradation to meet the present and future needs of all population. The emergence of a large body of knowledge and experience on the financial, economic, social and environmental aspects are pointing to the way for sustainable development practices that can be adopted by each country and community.

The organising committee issued a preliminary 8-page forum statement in which it agreed that they would be "solemnly committed to facing the global water challenges and to meeting the goals set forth at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in New York in 2000", — cutting by half the proportion of poor people without secure access to water and sanitation by 2015.

The commitments included several

global agreements, regional commitments and other key issues such as governance, capacity building, financing and building partnerships among the various stakeholders in the water sector.

"The need for capacity building, education and access to information for enhanced effectiveness in water management is unquestioned.

These critical elements of the water development processes are often treated as an add-on to programmes, with scant regard to local capacity building institutions, gender mainstreaming, cultural diversity and traditional knowledge or to long-term commitment," said the forum committee.

Among the 21 winners of the 'Water voice contest' organised by the forum were five Indians — Navaraj Samy Iyyah

Konar from Yadava college Madurai, S. Krishnammal of Yadava Women's College, Madurai, Abhik Gupta, R. Jagadishwara Rao of Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupathi and Surendra Kumar Sharma. A Gujarat-based NGO, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) also won the contest.

The former Prime Minister of Japan, Ryutaro Hashimoto, who is the Chairman, national steering committee of the forum, distributed the prizes.

About 24,000 participants from 182 countries attended.

The forum was held in the three Japanese cities of Kyoto, Shiga and Osaka from March 16 to 23, holding 351 separate sessions on 38 interlocking themes dealing with water

24 MAR 2003

INDIA

'Water vital for rural development'

By G. Venkataramani

SHIGA (JAPAN), MARCH 21. "Water is essential for broad-based agricultural and rural development in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals to improve food security and poverty alleviation. The challenges of sustainable water use and enhancing the partnership of all stakeholders in all aspects of agricultural water use, development and management and in providing increased access to water resources by all will be recognised and assigned top priority." This is the essence of the declaration adopted by the Ministerial Meeting on Water for Food and Agriculture at the third World Water Forum here today.

"We emphasise that achieving the objective of food security and poverty alleviation for an increasing world population will require the mobilisation of all resources of financing and increased investment in water-related infrastructure, research and development to sustain productivity gains and create new opportunities for the sustainable development and integrated management of water resources," said the

Ministers responsible for food and agriculture and the representatives of international organisations assembled here.

Outlining a plan of concrete actions, the participants said, "We will promote improved governance of agricultural water use through integrated water resources management including non-agricultural water use. This process should be efficient and equitable. It would involve the active participation of all user groups, including women and the poor in local water resources settings."

Several social and environmental activists protested the ministerial and other declarations favouring the private sector involvement in managing the water resources, and prevented the proceedings of the session in Kyoto. They took out a procession shouting slogans and waving banners condemning the blatant support of the international development agencies to privatisation of water. "Water is for people and not for profit. Let people and water remain the nature's way."

In the session on 'Rainwater harvesting and educational awareness', K.R. Gopinath,

Chairman of the KRG Rainwater Harvesting Foundation, a civil society organisation from India, highlighted the successful case studies of poor communities in Limdi municipality, Gujarat, being converted into multi-purpose "clean-green park". Using a multimedia presentation, he explained how integrated waterharvesting models have become a reality benefiting more than 3,000 families in the rural areas of Gujarat and other pockets in India. "We need to create more awareness among children, and we have done this successfully by employing simple, visible projects in the rural and urban centres in the country," explained Mr. Gopinath.

The World Water Council, meeting in Kyoto at the time of the outbreak of the hostilities in Iraq, has expressed serious concern about the sufferings that may be caused to innocent civilians by the destruction of water supply and sanitation infrastructures. The council intends to send a team of experts, at the earliest possible moment, to the affected areas to evaluate damage and recommend measures for emergency relief and rehabilitation of stricken systems.

Meet on ^{Swim} conservation of marine biodiversity

19-17
WJ
By Aarti Dhar

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19. Marine biologists, scientists and experts will come together in Kanyakumari, on March 21, to evolve an action plan for conservation of marine biodiversity. The two-day national conference organised by the Ministry of Environment and Forests will also deliberate upon ecological security.

Coastal areas in the country are increasingly under pressure from anthropogenic activities with the major areas of concern being over-exploitation of coastal resources and the impact of land-based activities and ship traffic. A number of issues arise in the management of marine environment, despite numerous laws and programmes. The conference will attempt to address them and draw an action plan for conservation of marine biodiversity.

Increasing population, besides economic and industrial growth have created pressure on coastal resources with some stretches in the country becoming highly polluted due to urbanisation and tourism, industrial waste, chemical waste from fertilizers and pesticides and silt from degraded catchments. Untreated sewage and non-industrial waste account for more pollution than industrial effluents.

Mining of sand from the seabed results in increase of turbidity in the ambient water affecting organisms and their productivity by limiting the availability of light. Aquaculture activity in some parts of the country has also exerted considerable pressure on the coastal resources. Construction relating to port development alters the sediment transport mechanisms in the coastal zones and result in erosion.

There has been a considerable influx of non-fishermen communities into the fishing sector, resulting in over-exploitation of marine resources. Though marine production has not exceeded the maximum sustainable yield (MSY), inappropriate exploitation patterns, such as concentration of fishing efforts in coastal waters, have had a detrimental effect.

The Agenda 21 — An Assessment, a document brought out by the Ministry of Environment and Forests has suggested strict implementation of the Government policies with specific stress on check of pollution from use of persistent organic pollutants, such as DDT for crop protection, and the need to provide adequate and appropriate support from the developed countries to ocean-related capacity-building in the developing countries. The effect of paints used on ships on marine organisms is being studied. The change of sex in Gastropoda, shell thickening, imbalances in growth and reproductive stages, and on larvae in oysters and mussels because of the antifouling paints are already known.

The need for some form of international involvement in the management of high-seas fishery resources, as observed by the U.N. Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks and the release of persistent hydrocarbons through ship traffic and their effect on global warming and climate change are other aspects highlighted by Agenda 21. It has also recommended framing of policies for coastal aquaculture, keeping in view the socio-economic and environmental aspects.

20 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

Impact assessment of fishing in Jambudwip island sought

By Our Staff Correspondent ¹³ ¹³ the report says.

NEW DELHI, MARCH 18. Back from the Jambudwip island, south of Sunderbans in the Bay of Bengal, a group of environmental activists have asked the Centre to conduct an impact assessment study of fishing and fish drying activity on the island to conserve the mangrove forest.

The activists from the Environmental Justice Initiative and the Delhi Forum, have demanded that the study be conducted by an independent commission of experts and no action be taken against the fishermen before such a study is completed. The visit was prompted by the report of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), instituted by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, recommending eviction of the transient fishermen from the Jambudwip island by March 31.

Suggesting that the area around the fish drying bed on the island be clearly demarcated and fenced, the environmentalists in their fact-finding report 'Endangered Livelihood' have said the transient fishing community should be made equal partners in any conservation effort and monitoring programme undertaken on the island. "The transient fishermen should be provided with economically viable alternative fuel so that the fishermen are not blamed for concerns regarding mangrove destruction,"

Over 10,000 fishermen go to the Jambudwip island between October and February to catch and dry the fish which becomes their source of livelihood. However, the World Wildlife Fund and the Wildlife Protection Society of India had complained to the Ministry of Environment and Forests regarding encroachment of forest land and destruction of mangrove forest because of fishermen and their fishing activities.

The CEC visited the island in December 2002 and directed the authorities concerned to evict the fishermen.

The transient fishermen should be issued identity cards by the Fisheries Department so as to eliminate the security concerns raised in the CEC report because of the island's proximity to a neighbouring country. There was also an agreement between the West Bengal Government and the fishermen on August 9, 2002 according to

which the State Government had assured that it would apply to the Ministry of Environment and Forests to regularise the drying of fish on the island, the fact-finding report says, while recommending that the agreement should be followed in letter and spirit.

Supporting the suggestion of anthropologist Bikash Raychoudhury, author of "The Moon and Net" (life of the fishermen on Jambudwip island), that rather than evicting them and depriving them of their livelihood, every step should be taken to protect this unique community of transient fishermen as they reflect not only an anthropological and cultural heritage.

The Jambudwip island including the waterways is a reserved forest notified in 1943.

The Forest Department of West Bengal claims that since there were no inhabitants when it was notified.

19 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

Nations urged to address water issues

TOKYO, MARCH 16. The World Water Forum opened today in Japan's western Kyoto prefecture, with more than 1,000 people from 160 countries taking part to discuss how issues including poverty and conflicts relate to water resources.

At the opening ceremony, the former Japanese Prime Minister, Ryutaro Hashimoto, called on the participants to come up with "concrete action" to tackle water issues.

"The forum should not be a mere forum for discussion. The time has come to put what has been discussed into action," said Mr. Hashimoto, who serves as head of the forum's steering committee.

Among other matters, Mr. Hashimoto called for efforts at meeting the international community's goal of halving by 2015 the proportion of people without access to potable water and basic sanitation.

"International organisations, Governments and experts as well as many individuals and groups such as NGOs (non-governmental organisations) working at the grassroots level are gathered at this third world water forum to search for complete measures for initiating action," the Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito

said at the opening ceremony.

The French President, Jacques Chirac, appeared in a video message for the opening ceremony, emphasising the French Government's commitment to addressing water issues, which he said would be discussed at the upcoming Group of Eight summit in Evian, France, in June.

Mr. Chirac, who had been scheduled to attend the forum, apologised for having had to cancel his trip to Japan, without citing a reason. The World Water Council, which is organising the forum, and the Moroccan Government presented Mahmoud Abu-Zeid, Egyptian Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, and Jerson Kelman, president of Brazil's National Water Agency, with the first-ever Hassan II Great World Water Prize.

The third international forum continues through March 23. The meeting will culminate in ministerial-level meetings on March 22 and 23.

Participants are scheduled to draw up statements for each of the 40 themes and submit them to the ministerial meeting so that Ministers can base their discussions on the inputs, according to the Water Forum secretariat.— DPA

17 MAR 2003

THE HINDU



Nuclear accident: 6 sentenced

TOKYO: Six executives who allowed workers to use buckets to fill a tank with uranium, triggering Japan's worst nuclear accident, received suspended prison terms at a court on Monday. One of them, the former head of the plant where the accident occurred, and the company that operated it were also fined. The six admitted negligence in the 1999 incident, which killed two workers and caused hundreds of people living near the uranium processing plant at Tokaimura, 140 km northeast of Tokyo, to be exposed to radiation. Passing sentence, Judge Hideyuki Suzuki said: "The accident gravely shocked society and vastly undermined public confidence in nuclear power." A string of accidents, scandals and cover-ups over the past decade has deeply dented public confidence in Japan's nuclear industry and its 52 commercial reactors. Resource-poor Japan relies on nuclear power for about 34 per cent of its electricity output and plans to raise that to 40 per cent. — Reuters

4 MAR 2008

Bottled water can't be destroyed: Sushma

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 20. — The government today expressed its inability to take action against the bottling plants of various brands of bottled water by confiscating the stocks and destroying them. Mrs Sushma Swaraj said in the Lok Sabha today that under the existing norms laid down by the Bureau of Indian Standards, the level of pesticide residues by the standard of "below detectable limit" was found to be all right.

Until the laws are amended, there could be no action, the health minister told Mr Naresh Puglia and three others in response to their calling attention motion in the Lok Sabha.

When Mr Puglia wanted to know why BIS withdrew ISI marking from eight bottling plants of different companies whose products were found to contain higher levels of pesticide residues after the test conducted by the Centre of Science and Environment, Mrs Swaraj said: "That is for the minister for consumer affairs to reply. Whatever I had to say concerning my ministry of health I have already said."

The consumer affairs minister, Mr Sharad Yadav, was not present in the House when the calling attention motion was taken up. The Motion was listed for the health minister to speak on behalf of the government. Mr

Ramjeevan Singh, Mr GM Banatwal and Mr IM Saradgi along with Mr Puglia questioned the irresponsible approach to the matter concerning public health by the Centre which created doubt in the public mind about the integrity of the government machinery.

Mrs Swaraj assured the members that the government has already initiated steps to amend the Prevention of Food Adulteration Rules to upgrade the mechanism as per the 'Capillary Method', which is the international standard of checking impurities in water.

The government has already notified the proposed amendments in the Gazette of India and invited 'objections' and/or 'suggestions' from the public within a month of the notification by 18 March so that they can be placed before the Central Committee for Food Studies before the amendments are



Mrs Sushma Swaraj

finalised.

The following amendments to the PFA rules have been proposed:

- Pesticide residues considered individually — 0.0001 mg/litre
- Total pesticide residues — 0.0005 mg / litre
- The manufacturers of drinking water and mineral water shall produce a no-objection certificate from the Centre/state government's Ground Water Authority for obtaining license from the BIS and Prevention of Food Adulteration authorities.

21 FEB 2003

THE STATESMAN

Pesticide stick for water units

envis 1-8 ref

New Delhi, Feb. 19 (PTI): The government has withdrawn the ISI quality mark for bottled water produced at Bisleri's Bangalore plant and Pepsico's Bharuch factory in Gujarat in the wake of reports of high concentration of pesticides in the water.

The drive against bottled water companies, through country-wide inspections, comes in less than a month of the findings by an independent study showing that the bulk of mineral water sold in India has very high levels of pesticide residue which is not in conformity with European norms.

The direction for withdrawal of the ISI mark to eight units, which would practically make it impossible for them to operate in India, came from consumer affairs minister Sharad Yadav on the grounds of failing to meet norms set by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) or for flouting the existing regulations.

The units barred from using the ISI mark are Kothari Beverages, Thane; Ion Exchange, New Mumbai; Pepsico India holding, Bharuch; Bisleri International, Bangalore; Vaibhav Aqua, Mumbai; Sardul Mineral Water and Soda, Jams-

hedpur; Vaishali Mineral Water, Hazipur; and Surat Beverages, Dadra.

"The minister has ordered withdrawal of the ISI mark from bottled water produced in eight locations based on nation-wide inspections carried out by the bureau. As a result these plants are debarred from producing and marketing the commodity," a top BIS official said.

A Pepsi spokesperson said the "water line in the Bharuch factory is very new and was in fact scheduled to receive its approval for starting operations last week after clearing the BIS tests".

"We had done independent tests of bottled water at our nine plants in the country last week and it was found that all of them meet the BIS, WHO and the EU standards," the spokesperson said.

A spokesperson of the Mumbai-based Ion Exchange said the company's consumer products division, which handles the bottled water business, has not received any letter of communication from the BIS. "We will be able to comment only after we receive any notification from the BIS," the spokesperson said.

20 FEB 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2003 ✓

END OF A PROLONGED WRANGLE

THE CAUVERY RIVER Authority's latest order directing Karnataka to ensure for three more days from February 11 (as stipulated by the Supreme Court on February 6) an average flow of 4,500 cusecs for Tamil Nadu at Mettur has, not surprisingly, left both the disputant States dissatisfied. The quantum which works out to a mere 2.8 tmcft over a week falls far short of the 10 tmcft Tamil Nadu said it needed, at the minimum, immediately to save at least a significant part of the standing rice (samba) crop raised over less-than-normal acreage and, as such, the Chief Minister, Jayalithaa, is "terribly disappointed". And her Karnataka counterpart, S.M. Krishna, is "unhappy" because, as he insists, the severely depleted storage in the four reservoirs in the Cauvery basin, being woefully inadequate for meeting his State's requirements, precludes any further release for Tamil Nadu. The rather prolonged wrangle between the two riparian States, which started with the first signs of a failing south-west monsoon in July-August last year and took on some avoidable streaks of bitterness, is attributable basically to the poor precipitation during both the south-west and north-east monsoons, with the evolving grave crisis posing a challenge as much to the political leadership of the two States over 'distress sharing' as to the CRA, the institutional mechanism charged with the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the Tribunal's interim award of 1991. At the end of it all, with the CRA's February 10 order signalling the end of the row that saw the issue being shunted between the Supreme Court and the CRA for well over four months, one cannot help feeling that a more flexible, conciliatory and accommodative approach on the part of the two States — their political executives, to be precise — would have served the cause of optimal utilisation of scarce water resources better and the process itself would have been less painful and acrimony-free, apart of course from cutting down much of the delay that the litigatory route had necessar-

ily entailed. *win 14/2 H9-10*

Of profound significance, from the standpoint of cracking the highly ticklish and vexed question of 'distress sharing', is the clear message the Supreme Court has sought to convey to the basin States by the kind of importance it attached to the CRA as the most appropriate and statutorily mandated forum for settling contentious issues. The apex court almost invariably made its decisions on water release, at different stages, subject to the consideration and possible revision by the CRA and, what is more, frowned upon any deliberate attempt to defy or scuttle that institution's orders. Again, by giving the sort of CRA-related directions it did on this occasion — that the quorum rules stand relaxed, that the CRA's order shall have the sanctity of a court order and, that in the absence of a consensus, the Chairman's (Prime Minister's) order shall be final — the Court has in effect passed a sharp indictment on those who tried to scuttle the Authority's meetings by resorting to strategic absenteeism or tended to render the institutional mechanism less than effective through devious methods. The major weakness of the CRA in not having worked out a fair and reasonable arrangement for sharing water in a bad monsoon year came into sharp focus as never before this time and it is regrettable that the body, created in 1998, has not been able to clinch a decision on a formula the monitoring panel has evolved for a 'pro rata' sharing. Its failure on this count has very much to do with the lack of political will on the part of the member-States, which in turn may be traced to their unwillingness to break free from the compulsions of realpolitik and rise above narrow partisan or parochial interests. One hopes that those who constitute the Authority, especially the Chief Ministers of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, will learn the right lessons and work in all earnestness for a viable and mutually beneficial formula for 'distress sharing', a task that necessarily calls for understanding and constructive cooperation among the States.

14 FEB 2003

Saving samba ruled out

By S.Vydhianathan

CHENNAI, FEB. 11. Saving even 20 per cent of standing samba in delta districts appears doubtful, as water to be released by Karnataka will be inadequate.

Already 80 per cent of the crop has withered and the fate of the crop in the remaining area depends on supply from the Mettur reservoir. Till now, farmers could save 20 per cent of the crop with groundwater. But as the level has gone down substantially in the past few days owing to continuous pumping, supply from the reservoir is necessary. But the quantum fixed by the Supreme Court and subsequently by the Prime Minister at Monday's Cauvery River Authority meeting may not meet the requirement.

As of now, about 4,500 cusecs has to be released in the Cauvery and in the Vennar and 3,500 cusecs a day in the Grand Anaicut to save the crop. For this, about 10,000 cusecs has to be released from the reservoir everyday for the next 10 days. But the storage in Mettur and the possible release of 4,500 cusecs by Karnataka will not be sufficient. So saving the crop is ruled out, except in areas where groundwater is available. From the beginning of the season, the State had been scaling down the area under samba. Though the normal coverage in the delta districts is about 5.5 lakh ha, including thaladi (late samba) on about 1.77 lakh ha, the Government earlier targeted to bring 4.5 lakh ha. But owing to poor water realisation in the reservoir during October and November last, it could cover only about 2.85 lakh ha. The crop on about 2.25 lakh ha has almost withered.

Water yet to reach Mettur

By A.V.Ragunathan

SALEM, FEB. 11. Despite the claim that Karnataka has started releasing over 4,500 cusecs of water from the Kabini reservoir from February 7, the stated quantum is yet to be realised in the Mettur dam, where the inflow this evening was 845 cusecs.

It would normally take three days for water to reach the reservoir, a distance of about 250 km. But even after five days, the inflow is not encouraging.

Unless the inflow picks up substantially, there could be further delay in water reaching delta districts.

Seepage loss

Two reasons are attributed to the poor inflow: the quantum is less and due to a break in the flow, seepage loss is significant. According to information reaching here, Karnataka started releasing 3,210 cusecs a day and stepped it up to 4,400 and 5,000 cusecs in the subsequent days.

As the volume is less, the flow could not acquire momentum to reach the destination within the expected time.

There is also the fear that the Karnataka Government, in anticipation of the Cauvery River Authority meeting, could have discontinued the supply on Monday, slowing down the flow further.

As per the Cauvery Disputes Tribunal award, Karnataka should have released 196.965 tmcft till today, but the inflow into Mettur was only 89.339 tmcft, leaving a shortfall of 107.626 tmcft.



ENFORCE BETTER STANDARDS

PURE WATER, AS claimed, is not pure enough. Many branded water bottles contain pesticide residues that exceed permissible levels, as a non-governmental agency's study showed last week. The Union Department of Science and Technology's experts have also confirmed it. Serious official efforts are now on to improve the existing standards and norms for "packaged drinking water". All this is putting pressure on the Rs.1,000-crore packaged or bottled water business. The Delhi-based NGO, Centre for Science and Environment, revealed that a random analysis of the bottled water of 30 brands in Delhi and Mumbai showed that many of the samples contained pesticide residues such as organochlorines and organophosphorous, including Lindane, DDT and Malathion. Within days of the study reports being made public, a flood of advertisements was released by the branded water manufacturers explaining the technologies they use to make their water as pure as can be.

But, the study report gained credence when the Union Minister for Science and Technology, Murli Manohar Joshi, personally wrote to the Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, stating that the department scientists "found considerable merit in the findings and conclusions" of the NGO study. In a flurry of welcome initiatives, the Union Ministry of Food and Civil Supplies has decided to update the provisions of the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act to raise the standards for packaged/bottled drinking water and the Bureau of Indian Standards wants to adopt European standards to limit individual pesticide residues in drinking water to less than one part in a billion and total pesticide residues to less than five parts in a billion. At present, BIS standards merely say pesticide residues should be "non-detectable".

Millions of consumers countrywide buy bottled and packaged water not merely for taste or convenience, but for the potential health bene-

fits the pure water is supposed to provide. Studies by the World Health Organisation show that drinking water can be contaminated by a range of chemical (lead, arsenic, benzene) and microbial hazards (bacteria or virus such as Hepatitis A and Vibrio Cholerae) or even physical hazards (metal and glass fragments). Again to quote the WHO, because of these large numbers of hazards, the development of standards for drinking water requires significant resources and expertise which many countries may not be able to afford. To guide the countries to set up uniform and strict standards, the WHO has now released a draft of its Edition 3 on drinking water quality. Most of the branded water makers say they comply to the existing Edition 2 of WHO standards as also the BIS standards.

The reasons for pesticide residues found in the drinking water are not far to seek. The source for most of the bottled or packaged water is surface water or municipal piped supply. Sometimes they depend on local river systems or water sources. In many developing nations such as India, all these sources are known to be polluted beyond reasonable levels by the indiscriminate dumping of municipal and industrial wastes. The impact of these is there for the world to see. Nearly 3.4 million persons die worldwide annually of water-related diseases. What is now required is a serious effort at the national level to evolve and strictly enforce accurate quantitative standards, as also regular/random sampling and testing systems. The enforcement machinery should come within the purview of a unified head, instead of remaining distributed among the Food, the Health and the Science and Technology departments. The labelling on the bottles also needs standardisation. However, the onus continues to be more on with the social responsibility shown by the corporate citizens. The least the manufacturers can do is to ensure the best of health for their consumers by complying with global norms on water purity.

SC orders Karnataka to release 4,500 cusecs a day to T.N.

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, FEB. 6. The Supreme Court today came to the rescue of the Cauvery delta farmers in Tamil Nadu to save the standing 'samba' crop by directing Karnataka to ensure an average release of 4,500 cusecs (amounting to 0.4 tmcft) of water a day from tomorrow at Mettur reservoir till the Cauvery River Authority headed by the Prime Minister took a decision at its meeting on February 10.

Significantly, a three-Judge Bench comprising Justice R.C. Lahoti, Justice Y.K. Sabharwal and Justice Arijit Pasayat made it clear that the CRA meeting would take place even in the absence of a quorum of three Chief Ministers and that the decision of the CRA would be final, having the sanctity of a court order and binding on all the parties.

While senior counsel for Tamil Nadu, K.K. Venugopal, pleaded that Karnataka should be directed to release at least 10,000 cusecs, senior counsel for Karnataka, F.S. Nariman, maintained that the State could release only 1,200 cusecs a day.

In view of the divergent stand, the Bench summoned the Chairman of the Cauvery Monitoring Committee, A.K. Goswami and its previous Member-Secretary, R.K.

Sharma and ascertained from them (in their Chambers) the availability of water in the reservoirs of Karnataka, the quantity of water being released every day and the immediate requirement of water by Tamil Nadu to save its standing crops.

The Bench expressed the hope that the February 10 meeting of the CRA would "positively arrive at a decision".

It gave liberty to the CRA to suitably modify or change the order as per the discussions and consensus that might be evolved therein.

The Bench recorded an undertaking from counsel of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka that their Chief Ministers would positively attend and participate in the meeting.

It was also made clear that in the absence of consensus among the States at the CRA meeting, the decision of the Prime Minister as Chairman of the Authority shall be decisive.

The Bench further said that this order, subject to such changes as the CRA might make on February 10, shall be treated as an order of the court and "it is the obligation of the parties to implement the same."

Of no use, says
Jayalalithaa: Page 13

11-19 Purified water goes the label, but few of us quite believed that. Even by our now low expectations, the expose on branded bottled water conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment will both frighten and shock. The bottles contain, not just a few impurities -- we're quite used to that in almost all edible products -- but dangerous levels of toxic pesticides. The more popular brands contain as much as 104 times the safe limit as prescribed by the EU. Pesticides like chlorpyrifos and malathion weaken the immune system, attack the nervous system and increase susceptibility to cancer. Yet, an increasingly health conscious public has been taking to these brands in the conviction that they are safer than our polluted drinking water supplies. Given that bottled water is drawn from tubewells, it should have been obvious to health safety authorities that it would contain various contaminants including pesticides. Numerous studies earlier have revealed that pesticides have leached into groundwater sources. But the issue here is that the water ought to be cleaned and made totally sterile. To be fair to the bottled water industry, it has only followed standards set by the Bureau of Indian Standards which prescribes tests that do not reveal pesticides. Indeed, these tests fall far below international standards. The BIS reaction? -- We'll study the report.

Purified water, goes the label, but few of us quite believed that. Even by our now low expectations, the expose on branded bottled water conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment will both frighten and shock. The bottles contain, not just a few impurities -- we're quite used to that in almost all edible products -- but dangerous levels of toxic pesticides. The more popular brands contain as much as 104 times the safe limit as prescribed by the EU. Pesticides like chlorpyrifos and malathion weaken the immune system, attack the nervous system and increase susceptibility to cancer. Yet, an increasingly health conscious public has been taking to these brands in the conviction that they are safer than our polluted drinking water supplies. Given that bottled water is drawn from tubewells, it should have been obvious to health safety authorities that it would contain various contaminants including pesticides. Numerous studies earlier have revealed that pesticides have leached into groundwater sources. But the issue here is that the water ought to be cleaned and made totally sterile. To be fair to the bottled water industry, it has only followed standards set by the Bureau of Indian Standards which prescribes tests that do not reveal pesticides. Indeed, these tests fall far below international standards. The BIS reaction? -- We'll study the report.

The bottled water scandal is the latest in a series of entirely avoidable compromises made in food safety standards. Not long ago, it was revealed that under the law, there was actually a permissible limit for rat droppings and hair in atta. Then came adulterated mustard oil. As for doctored milk and spices, we have almost learnt to live with them. Since cheating the consumer seems to come so easily to manufacturers, it is up to the health authorities to exercise far greater vigilance. There is no justification for Indian standards to be lower than accepted international norms. The health of consumers apart, in sheer economic terms, India is losing out on the international market, as can be seen from the increasing rejection of Indian edible product consignments. There is no merit in the argument that more stringent standards will raise cost to consumers. The profile of the branded bottled water consumer is such that she will gladly pay a little more rather than compromise safety standards. With a huge per annum growth rate, Indian brands could have been looking at lucrative foreign markets. Instead they appear to have jeopardised their own domestic market.

6 FEB 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Not playing it safe with mineral water

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 4. — If you have stocked up those mineral water bottles, you would be better off getting rid of them right now. In the light of what the Centre for Science and Environment declared today, the consumers aren't really "playing safe" but rather are living dangerously. The environmental NGO claims that bottled mineral water, far from being pure, are a deadly cocktail of pesticide residues.

The organisation today declared their findings on samples of 17 brands of mineral water collected from various places, in Delhi and Ghaziabad. According to the director, CSE, Mrs Sumita Narain, the samples were found having pesticide

residues up to 36.4 times in excess of the prescribed level of 0.0001. She said that these samples were collected from bore wells and other water sources used by manufacturing companies as raw material.

Experts say that in the long run pesticide contamination can cause cancer, liver and kidney damage, disorders of the nervous system, birth defects and disruption of the immune system. "Pesticides don't kill immediately, but cause irreversible health disorders as they accumulate in body fat," she said. Most commonly found pesticide residues were Lindane, DDT, malathion and chlopyrifos.

The CSE found highest concentration of pesticide residues in No.1 McDowell mineral water followed by Bisleri, Volga, Kingfisher, Kwenenger, Hello, Batley, Paras

and others (see table for other brands). According to Mrs Narain, almost all of these contained five different pesticide residues exceeding the specified standards.

"The irony is the least contaminated bottled brands have the lowest sale; those violating norms are the largest selling brands," said Mrs Narain. The concentration levels of pesticide residues ranged from 79 times to 104 times.

The study was conducted between July 2002 and January 2003 on randomly selected sealed bottles bought from the markets. The laboratory tests showed that Delhi samples had 36.4 times more pesticide residues than the stipulated levels. The Mumbai samples were found comparably better. But the worst offenders there also had pesticide levels up to 16.4

times higher than the prescribed norms.

She said the CSE had used European norms because the standards set by Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) were 'vague and undefined'.

She also said the studies were conducted in a planned way and had no malafide intentions.

She said the CSE team had also collected raw water samples and most of these were from bore wells located in industrial and agricultural areas in Delhi and in Shahibabad, Noida and Ghaziabad.

The source for the brands sold in Mumbai happened to be municipal water. The CSE also claimed these reputed brands did not use their micro-filtration facilities to purify raw water.

MINERAL WATER BRAND AND PESTICIDAL RESIDUES (In mg per litre) FOUND IN THEIR TWO RANDOM SAMPLES

- Aquaplus: 0.0528 & 0.0524
- No. 1 McDowell: 0.0550 & 0.0284
- Bisleri: 0.0552 & 0.0337
- Volga: 0.0265 & 0.0366
- Kingfisher: 0.0289 & 0.029
- Kwencher: 0.0241 & 0.0255
- Hello: 0.0209 & 0.0214
- Batley: 0.0209 & 0.0214
- Paras: 0.0196 & 0.0179
- Kinley: 0.0140 & 0.00006
- Pure Life: 0.0076 & 0.0068
- Prime: 0.0071 & 0.006
- Minacot: 0.0047 & 0.0049
- Aquafina: 0.0054 & 0.0017
- Catch: 0.0035 & 0.0020
- Himalayan: 0.0020 & 0.0009

THE NATIONAL river interlinking plan has been enthusiastically received for three central claims it makes for itself. One, it would lead to a permanent drought-proofing of the country by raising the irrigation potential to equal the current net sown area of about 150 million hectares. Two, it would solve, or at least mitigate, the annual floods in the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. Three, it would add 30,000 MW of hydropower to the national pool.

It is not often that there is such un-qualified consensus over a policy issue, with the Supreme Court going so far as to "direct" the Government to interlink rivers within 10 years. As a result, the Government has set up a "Task Force" headed by the former Union Power Minister, Suresh Prabhu, to build national consensus, work out the detailed plans, and complete the entire work by 2016.

River interlinking as a solution for drought and floods is not a new proposal but this wide-ranging consensus has not emerged after a thorough debate over the merits and problems of this plan of hydrological engineering which perhaps has no precedent anywhere in the world.

It was the former Union Minister of Irrigation and Power, K.L. Rao, who, in 1972, first presented his plan to link the Ganga and the Cauvery. In 1974, a similar proposal of a "garland" canal was submitted by Captain Dastur. The Government prepared its own plan in 1980 and in 1982 the National Water Development Agency was set up to carry out detailed studies on the issue.

The NWDA budgets the entire project at Rs.5,60,000 crores (\$112 billion) at 2002 prices. But Mr. Prabhu himself says it could go up to \$200 billion. It envisions a 30-year plan but following the Supreme Court directive, the Task

The smaller, the better

MICHAEL EVENARI, an Israeli scientist, was intrigued when he saw ancient towns in the middle of the Negev desert which gets only about 100 mm of rain every year. Not only did they have their own drinking water systems, but surplus for agriculture too!

This research on this led to a path-breaking finding, that small catchments manage to hold more water than larger ones. He showed that 3,000 micro-catchments of 0.1 hectares each give five times more water than one catchment of 300 hectares!

Similar studies by the Central Soil and Water Conservation Research Institute at its campuses in Agra, Bellary, Kota and Shillong have shown that 10 tiny dams with a catchment of one hectare each would collect more water than one larger dam with a catchment of 10 hectares.

The late Anil Agarwal of the Centre for Science and Environment calculated that on average each Indian village can harvest about 3.75 billion litres of water every year! This can not only cater to all the drinking water needs of the human and cattle population, but also provide for some irrigation.

Himanshu Thakkar of the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People questions the wisdom of letting rain water flow hundreds of kilometres into a big river and then spending crores of rupees to divert it back again to irrigate lands where it originally fell as rain.

Being "moonsoon country", Indian villages get most of their rain as a heavy downpour for just a 100

hours out of the total 8,760 hours in a year. This water must be stored properly and used sensibly during the 8,660 hours without rain.

India has a rich tradition of water harvesting at the local level. Whether they are the "zings" of Ladakh, the "ahars" of Bihar, the "johads" of Rajasthan, the "baolis" of North and Central India, the "eris" of Tamil Nadu or the "kuntas" of Andhra Pradesh, people in each region have evolved their own techniques keeping in mind the local geo-climatic zone.

With the emergence of modern irrigation and the spread of commercial agriculture, state institutions and rich farmers try to snatch two, even three, harvests of cash crops from the soil. This is when systems of community-based water conservation and use get neglected. The rich landowners would rather get irrigation water or, even better, pump groundwater with electricity, all of which are subsidised in the name of the poor.

Even in the context of a growing commercialisation of agriculture and increasing integration with the market, it is possible to both encourage water conservation as well as promote efficiency of water use. But the trends point to an entirely different direction. While irrigation canals accounted for 41.3 per cent of the irrigated area in 1970, this had fallen to 31.3 per cent by 1998. During the same period, the net area irrigated by tubewells rose from 14.3 per cent to 33.8 per cent, while the net area irrigated by tanks declined from 13.2 per cent to 5.7 per cent. — A.A.

Force has published a timetable which lists 2016 as the date for completion. No explanation has been provided on how this is to be managed.

Such a project should have been preceded by a detailed assessment of its financial viability, technological capability, ecological sustainability and political feasibility. Unfortunately, the NWDA is yet to publish any "Detailed Project Report" though it has conducted some "Feasibility Studies" over the past two decades.

The NWDA plan has divided the project into two broad "components" — the Himalayan part with 14 river links estimated at Rs. 3,75,000 crores and the Peninsular component with 17 river links estimated at Rs. 1,85,000 crores. A former Secretary in the Union Water Resources Ministry has, however, gone on record that the "latest estimated cost" of only the Peninsular component is about Rs.5,00,000 crores! These links stretch from the Sutlej in the North to the Vaippar in the South and from the Brahmaputra in the East to the Mahi in the West.

If the economics of the scheme seem to make it extremely improbable, serious reservations can be raised about some of its claims and assumptions too. Let us look at two of these — the claim of flood control and the assumption that the Ganga, the Brahmaputra, the Mahanadi and the Godavari are water surplus.

From being a river which supported inland trade and passenger traffic 150 years ago, the Ganga has become a silt-choked shadow of its former self. The British used it to ship their troops from Bengal to Kanpur and Delhi during the 1857 War of Independence. Today, the Calcutta port is so silted up that crores of rupees have been invested to build another port at Haldia. It was to overcome the silting of the Calcutta port that the Farakka barrage was constructed to divert more water to the "Indian" stream. While Farakka has led to drastically reduced water flows to Bangladesh and resulted in constant diplomatic attrition with that country, it has not been able to save the Calcutta port. Where has this water gone?

One, the source of the river is drying up, like almost all other Himalayan rivers. It is well known that the Godavari glacier which feeds the river has receded by over 14 km in the last century alone. Today you will have to trek two days more than your grandparents did to reach Gangotri! Two, increasing amounts of the river's waters are already being used for irrigation as well as urban needs. Moreover, almost half of the Ganga's water at Patna originates in Nepal which has its own "plans" to develop its hydrological resources. Once these come up flows would be further reduced in the Ganga.

Similar stories puncture the claims of the Brahmaputra, the Mahanadi and the Godavari being water surplus. In any case, the riparian States through which these rivers pass have their own plans to use this "surplus"

Serious reservations can be raised about some of the claims and assumptions of the national river interlinking plan, writes Aniket Alam.

water for "developing" their "backward" regions.

This puts another question mark on the scheme's political feasibility. Try visualising Punjab parting with "its" water for Tamil Nadu, when neighbouring Karnataka was willing to disobey the Supreme Court on this issue. The political minefield this interlinked river grid would create may perhaps threaten the very unity of India like no terrorist can.

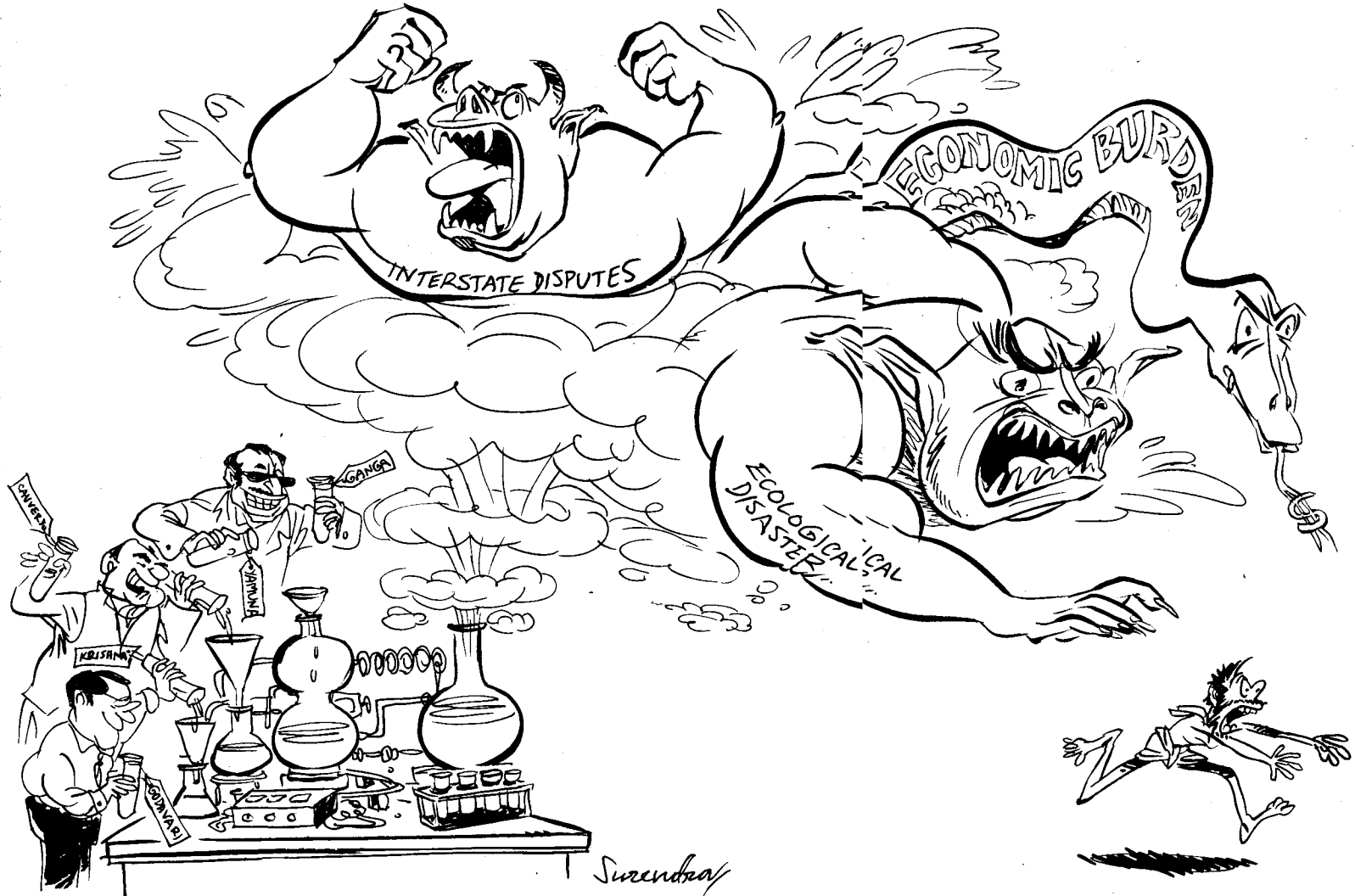
Even on the ecological front, consider the fallout of 200 large water storage reservoirs and an extensive network of canals. Linking these rivers and storage reservoirs would eat into the natural habitats of wildlife and re-shape the ecology of the country with unknown consequences. There are not even any estimates re-

mitigate floods is a mystery.

It must also be remembered that floods are not merely destructive, but essential components of a river's life. They flush out the river and recharge the drainage channel for water flow. Any attempt to stop (or as it is said "utilise") all the water in a given river would be disastrous. A river is nature's method of draining the land of water and it has its own ecological rhythm. Capturing all its water and stopping its natural flow is tantamount to "killing it". Apart from severe water logging and consequent salinity, this would also lead to a cycle of uncontrollable floods and searing droughts as the consequences of such a massive disruption of the river basin's hydrological cycle unravel.

Countries with a history of playing around with their rivers and "controlling" them are now investing billions of dollars to "restore" them by removing dams and embankments. In the U.S. alone, more than 100 dams were removed between 1999 and

Pipe-dream?



demonstrated high efficiency rates. Why are these methods not taken up by citing lack of resources by the same Government which is willing to finance this gargantuan river linking project?

Its estimated cost, Rs. 5,60,000 crores at 2002 prices, equals 25 per cent of our Gross Domestic Product, or two and a half times our annual tax collection and double our present foreign exchange reserves. Where is the investible capital of this magnitude available in the domestic economy? According to the Government's Economic Survey for 2001-2002, the country's Gross Domestic Savings were lower than the estimated cost of this project which is also higher than India's total outstanding external debt by close to \$12 billion!

The only option would be to raise funds from international sources, part from the fact that this would incur a debt of about \$112 on every \$100 (where average annual incomes range between \$400 and \$800), it also raises questions about how this loan is to be returned, the guarantees and interest-guarantees that would need to be given to secure it. Moreover, equal interest on this amount would range between Rs. 20,000 crores and Rs.30,000 crores.

User charges for irrigation or power provided by this scheme may make these uneconomical for both the agricultural and industrial sectors. They would put inflationary pressure on the prices of our agricultural produce even as we try to make these competitive in the international market. A big question mark is also put over the political viability of collecting these user charges. External borrowing of this scale would also make future Indian Governments so much more vulnerable to foreign financial pressures.

The real threat is that after stalling the project with much fanfare and investing thousands of crores into it, a future Government would have to imply abandon it as its financial implications unravel, leaving billions of cubic metres of earth dug up and the use of the country scarred or ruined. The alternative would be to hand over the project, and along with it the entire water resources of the country, to water MNCs to build and run!

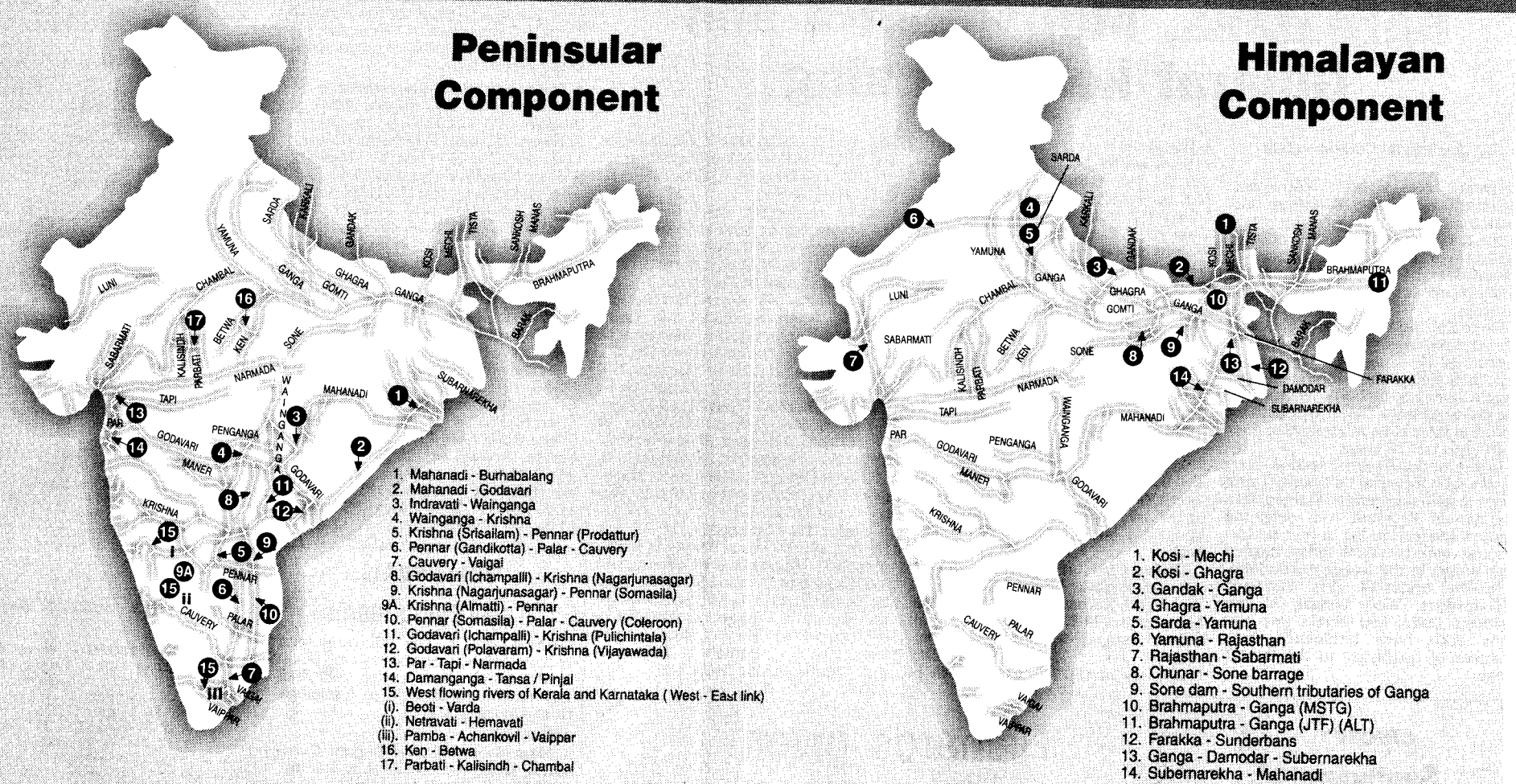
It is merely a matter of time before the Government throws up its hands and asks for private participation. An army of apologists would argue that private participation is necessary to "save" the billions already sunk in the project. This is the thin edge of the wedge for the wholesale privatisation of water in the country. At the World Water Forum meeting in 2001, water MNCs successfully lobbied to get the U.N. to define water as a "human

need" as distinct from "human right". By the WTO's definitions, which are increasingly running the market, human needs can be supplied by private entrepreneurs for a profit, unlike a human right which accrues equally to everyone.

The World Bank estimated in 1998 that global trade in water would generate \$800 billion a year in the first decade of this century. So, it is not difficult to identify where the eventual funds for the scheme would come from and who would control it. Water, like air and unlike other natural resources, is very difficult to own and control privately. It is a quintessential "common" resource and most attempts at making it a generalised commodity to be bought and sold in the market have been unsuccessful. That may have been because these attempts were piecemeal, one river, one town, one province at a time. India's national river linking plan attempts to bring all the water resources of an entire subcontinent under one organised command.

By stoking the Promethean ambitions of engineers and planners, by tickling the greed of the politician-bureaucrat-contractor nexus and by seducing the larger public with dreams of water security, this scheme may well create conditions where large-scale privatisation of water becomes the only option. That we are moving towards this future blindly is the real danger.

PROPOSED LINKS UNDER STUDY



Water wars

Sharing the waters of inter-State rivers has proved problematic so far, points out Gargi Parsai.

In the matter of the Sardar Sarovar Project also, the Supreme Court intervened to raise the height of the dam while directing States to do simultaneous rehabilitation and resettlement of project affected people. None of the States did that.

However, in a behind-the-scenes move on the eve of the Gujarat Assembly elections, at a meeting convened by Mr. Vajpayee, the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh, and the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, came to a tacit understanding after which Mr. Singh decided to offer cash compensation to the thousands of oustees in his State which is the worst ever form of compensation. The Centre and the Court both are as yet quiet on this.

In such a scenario, the Centre is moving cautiously on a consensus for interlinking rivers. If sharing the waters of inter-State rivers has proved problematic so far, things are hardly likely to get better in this day of coalition politics and regional parochialism. Senior officials in the Water Resources Ministry feel that interlinking being a national-level

endeavour is a category in itself, unlike inter-State sharing of waters. It will be tied to water pricing, tariff structure, diversification of cropping pattern, internal rates of return, cost-benefits and so on, fill the whole thing becomes self-sustaining.

All current inter-State water agreements will hold only after meeting the surplus State's demands will the waters be transferred. Moreover, the donor States are likely to be compensated with hydropower or even development funds, for the waters they spare.

But one thing is certain. People will have to pay up for the criss-cross of canals and dams that will be constructed under this project, through raised water tariffs and irrigation costs. People will also have to pay with large-scale displacement of habitations, and loss of forests and farmland.

The Government would do well to ensure that this does not become another grandiose Centralised plan that is thrust on the people and later resisted by them. People's participation is as important as political consensus.

with the Yamuna, which is to carry Haryana's share (3.5 million acre feet) of Sutlej waters. The Centre has spent about Rs. 450 crores on the canal. The construction was abandoned in 1990 at the height of militancy in Punjab when a Chief Engineer of the Central Water Commission and some labourers were gunned down.

Instead of abiding by the apex court's decision, the Punjab Chief Minister, Amarinder Singh, has linked political demands such as the transfer of Chandigarh and the distribution of border districts between Haryana and Punjab with the SYL. He even raked up the distribution of Ravi-Beas waters between Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir at the time of reorganisation of Punjab in 1966 when an agreement was signed between the States. He stood up the Supreme Court and then its own assurance in the CRA. Now, one Chief Minister or the other keeps away from the CRA meetings convened by the Prime Minister, not only undermining a body set up under the directive of the Supreme Court but also the authority of the Prime Minister.

In the Cauvery dispute also, the apex court intervened to direct Karnataka to release 1.25 thousand million cubic feet

40-12

BHAVANI RIVER ROW

12

THE UNION ENVIRONMENT Ministry's decision to withhold clearance to Kerala for the construction of a weir to divert water from the Bhavani, an inter-State tributary of the Cauvery, highlights the disquiet over the potential ecological impact of the river diversion on the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve. The Ministry has apparently paid heed to complaints about felling of trees in the Mannarkad forest area for creating the weir and a channel. The Union Ministry's intervention though not exactly on the water-sharing row but seeking to address the environmental fallout of the project may bring a pause in the standoff between the two States. What began as an innocuous minor irrigation work rapidly emerged as a confrontation point between Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The war of words appears quite disproportionate to the size of the project, which envisages the utilisation of less than one thousand million cubic feet (1 tmcft) of water to irrigate areas which Tamil Nadu says are outside the Bhavani river basin. The complaints by Tamil Nadu's farmers against the diversion and the Kerala Government's charge that Tamil Nadu is not honouring its commitments in inter-State water sharing agreements seemed to drown the concerns raised by environmentalists and Opposition leaders in Kerala, that the water diversion may further erode the already denuded forests.

The Bhavani being a segment of the Cauvery basin, the standoff is also unfortunately emerging as another acrimonious point within the overall Cauvery dispute. The present arguments rose a month ago, when the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister wrote to her Kerala counterpart opposing the weir construction at Mukkali to divert the water course westwards, from the east-flowing Bhavani. Tamil Nadu feels that the diversion was being done even when the Cauvery issue is pending before the Tribunal. And second, the water is to be diverted outside the already water-deficient Cauvery basin. Both could adversely affect some drinking water supply and

irrigation schemes in Tamil Nadu. The State has taken it up with the Cauvery Tribunal already. However, Kerala contends that it wants to utilise only one tmcft for irrigation, although as per the 1973 inter-State agreement under the Siruvani Drinking Water Supply Scheme, it could utilise 2.5 tmcft of Bhavani water after construction of the Siruvani reservoir. Adding to the heat was the Kerala Water Resources Minister, T.M. Jacob's charge that Tamil Nadu was violating inter-State river water accords such as the Parambikulam-Aliyar Project, and the Mullaperiyar and the Siruvani water supply agreements, though Kerala was honouring its commitments to provide water to Tamil Nadu despite great difficulties.

As the trading of charges goes on, a saner argument needs to be articulated. Tamil Nadu need not have a grouse if the water is used within the river basin itself and not taken outside, or the course of the river is not changed. The Kerala Chief Minister's stand that he is prepared for talks with Tamil Nadu on all pending water disputes needs to be followed up. The experience of long-standing water disputes shows that only the farming communities and those in dire need of drinking water suffer in a standoff, as also the Government's administration and finances. If water disputes continue to foment hostility among States and their peoples, the concept of inter-basin transfers will be rendered meaningless. Any discussion on inter-basin transfers cannot centre around only water sharing, but should go into long-term means to ensure the nation's water and food security as also the environmental impact of changing river courses and transferring huge quantities of water across different land features. A rational starting point would be for the Irrigation Ministers of the States concerned to sit and settle water-sharing points before every irrigation season. The talks should be held under a structured mechanism that provides at least interim solutions to protect the interests of farmers on all sides in a balanced manner.

THE HINDU

7 FEB 2003

Water Ways

Convening the Cauvery River Authority (CRA) consisting of the prime minister and four chief ministers appears to be more problematic than convening the SAARC summit. The scheduled meeting of the CRA had to be adjourned twice for want of a quorum. But then we hardly expect our politicians to actually do the jobs they are elected for. Our readers might be interested to know why exactly water politics has come to occupy so much attention in the southern states. The genesis of the shortage may be traced to Tamil Nadu going in for two paddy crops a year as opposed to one earlier. The next problem arose when Karnataka decided to go in for water-intensive sugarcane cultivation with the mushrooming of distilleries. To compound problems, there is disproportionate wastage of water owing to badly-constructed open irrigation canals. None of this is unknown, yet there has been no attempt to address the problems in a holistic manner. The first step would be to change cropping patterns. Sceptics will argue that the farmers' lobby will oppose this but a way out can be found if the government reduces the support price on water-intensive crops and increases it for cash-intensive ones. Perhaps, both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka can take a leaf out of neighbouring Kerala's book. Despite not being water-deficient, the state has changed crop patterns, the emphasis being on high revenue-yielding crops like spices and floriculture.

This is all the more imperative as both Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are urbanising rapidly with the attendant demand on greater water usage. Perhaps it would be best to reconstitute an independent authority autonomous of political influence whose recommendations would be binding on the states concerned. It could evolve a package of policies which would optimise the benefits to the farmers of the Cauvery basin equitably in both states under conditions of water inadequacy. The farmers in both states have suffered for too long with the issue being used as a political bargaining chip. In the absence of any visible commitment to resolve the problem, extraneous players have been attempting to hijack the agenda. It was not so long ago that the sandalwood smuggler and brigand Veerappan took up the Cauvery issue in a blatant bid to fuel Tamil chauvinism. This is a dangerous trend and it is in the enlightened self-interest of both states to facilitate an early resolution of the issue.

18 JAN 2003

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2003

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SHARING OF DISTRESS

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THE QUANTUM OF Cauvery water Karnataka has agreed to release as a "gesture of goodwill" — a total of six tmcft at 1200 cusecs on a daily basis till the end of February — has brought some but not much cheer to Tamil Nadu. What the State has been promised is nowhere near the quantity it would require for the standing (samba) paddy crop — which according to the Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, has been placed by an agricultural expert last November at 45 tmcft — and represents just one-third of the 18-plus tmcft which Karnataka is reported to have run into 'deficit' as per the monitoring committee's formula for the proportionate sharing of 'distress'. Having lost almost entirely the short term (kuruvai) paddy crop due to a particularly bad south-west monsoon and having since been let down by the north-east monsoon also, Tamil Nadu farmers in the Cauvery delta are now haunted by the spectre of even the main samba crop meeting with a similar disaster. For its part, Karnataka has its own tale of woe and difficulties in meeting the irrigation and drinking water requirements, given the stark reality that this year has by any reckoning been an exceptionally bad one on the monsoon front. In the circumstances, prudence demands that the water requirements of the co-riparians are prioritised in a manner that would put the available storage to optimal use and this is precisely where mutual understanding and a spirit of accommodation are called for. Which is to say that whatever water is released should not be too meagre or so thinly spread over time to make any beneficial impact and that the two Governments would be well advised to co-opt apolitical sections of the farming community in such an endeavour.

On a different level, it needs to be noted that Karnataka's consent to spare "some water" for Tamil Nadu was an offshoot of the talks the Prime Minister had at the informal level with its Chief Minister, S. M. Krishna, after the postponement (for want of a quorum) of the Cauvery River Authority meeting called to consider the

contentious 'distress sharing' related issues. With the Supreme Court already seized of the question of its obligation under the Tribunal's interim order and as one facing a related 'contempt of court' charge, the upper riparian was evidently wary enough not to render itself vulnerable to a judicial frown yet again by taking a rigid 'no water to spare' stand. More basically, what stands out in the continuing Tamil Nadu-Karnataka wrangle over water sharing (under the Tribunal's June 1991 interim award) in a bad monsoon year is the palpable disinclination or lack of interest on the part of those constituting the CRA in working it the way a dispute-resolving mechanism — in a highly sensitive area such as sharing of the waters of an inter-State river — ought to be worked. Witness, for instance, the fact that the two disputant States could not see eye to eye even on physically verifiable data or agree on the point of reference to determine the quantum of water released (by Karnataka) and that the CRA, in spite of constant goading by the apex court, failed to bring the necessary political will to bear on the crucial task of evolving a consensus on an equitable 'distress sharing' formula.

What needs to be recognised is that for any method of dispute resolution to work — whether it be negotiation, conciliation, arbitration or even adjudication for that matter — a substantial degree of goodwill and sense of fairness is absolutely essential and this is one reason why the Supreme Court has, at every available opportunity during the ongoing Karnataka-Tamil Nadu legal battle, been consistently trying to impress upon the two States the wisdom of exploring the CRA route. If the involvement of the heads of governments of the riparian States, with the Prime Minister at the helm, provided the much-needed leeway to the CRA in making decisions on contentious issues, the efficacy of the institutional mechanism depended ultimately on how exactly the individual players at any given time used that deemed advantage.

THE HINDU