

**RIVER LINK NEWS****HOW OPPOSITION IS MOUNTING**

Farmers in the Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka has come out strongly against the govt's plan to interfere with the natural course of rivers. As a part of its plan to inter-link rivers across the state the govt intends to turn the Nethravathi eastwards and change the course of a few other westward flowing rivers. Framers dependent on the Nethravathi have also begun to feel that the entire project would deprive them of the water of a river that has been flowing through this region for centuries and has been the main source of sustenance for thousands of families. (BUSINESS LINE 121202)



This scheme has been subjected to severe criticism since the days of the irrigation commission of British Govt and elaborate plans like Captain Dastur's "Garland Canal" was out rightly rejected quite long ago. Inter-linking of rivers was summarily rejected by the Centre in 1990 accepting the advice of then secretary water resources M S Reddy and array of other experts. A mammoth project to link the peninsular rivers will engender a human catastrophe of an unparalleled magnitude. It will be an utter disaster for the reason when there is substantial water if we care to utilise it frugally and carefully, there is never enough if our sole mode is to use as much as possible and the factors responsible for the Cauvery crisis is traceable to the latter practice. In the disastrous Sardar Sarovar Project lakhs of landholders had to lose their lands due to the network of canals. Of these 23 500 will lose upwards of 25% of their land, with 2000 losing all their lands. Not one these households are considered project affected and eligible for rehabilitation. Linking of all major rivers is tantamount to rejection of the decentralised water systems, which can meet legitimate requirements at cheaper costs. (NEWTIME 271202)

**SC on Dec 16** The Centre has submitted an action plan in the Supreme Court stating that it complete the proposed inter-linking of major rivers by the end of 2016. The plan was placed on 16<sup>th</sup> Dec. before the three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice, G B Pattanaik, by the Attorney General. He also informed the Bench of the constitution of a task force for the purpose. Suresh Prabhu would head the task force as chairman while C C Patel would be the vice-chairman and C D Thatte would be the member secretary. Recording this, the Bench adjourned the proceedings. This was following the SC order of Oct 31 2002. (THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS 181202, DRP 0203)

**Not possible: Chhatisgarh**

The water resource minister of Chhattisgarh has said that inter-linking of rivers is not an easy task. The states like Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and others are not agreed on this project, he revealed after attending the national conference of water resource and irrigation ministers. He said that if all states were agreed then Forest Conservation Act would be violated and hence the Inter-linking of rivers is not possible. He said that if the states like Chhattisgarh and Orissa are not agreed on a small issue of Indravati River since many years, then how can it possible, where many states are involved. (RAJASTHAN PATRIKA 081203)



Though interlinking of rivers is becoming an obsession with the govt, and even as the PM defended it at least two states spoke against the project at the 12<sup>th</sup> National Conference of Water Resources and Irrigation Ministers in Delhi. Maharashtra's Minister for Irrigation said "Prime Minister's ambitious project of interlinking of national rivers would not at all prove beneficial to Maharashtra". He asked the Centre to divert water from its westward bound rivers to Godavari and Tapi instead. Alleging that the National Water development Agency was planning to divert water from its territory to adjoining states, he asked the Centre to setup fresh Krishna water Disputes Tribunal. Kerala also urged the Centre not to go ahead with the Pampa-Achanakovil-Vypar link project as the state is already facing water shortage in this basin. Kerala would also oppose plans to link rivers originating from the Western Ghats as part of the Centre's ambitious interlinking project, state Irrigation Minister said. As far as Kerala was concerned, interlinking the Western Ghats rivers sounded "unscientific", he added. (THE INDIAN EXPRESS, HINDUSTAN TIMES, BUSINESS LINE 060203 & BUSINESS STANDARD 140203)



The noted Geographer and Head of Dept of Environmental Science, Guwahati University Dr D C Goswami said that the decision of the Central govt was nothing but a step in the wrong direction. The basic flaw in the basin linking proposal is that it has not cared to assess the water requirement status of the so called water surplus basins. Without doing all the exercises seriously it is really incomprehensible as to how they could identify the water surplus areas. According to computer model of Brahmaputra, he said that the ground reality was such that in the so called excess areas like in Assam, there had been a gross

underutilisation of water resources, which might have led to the assumption surplus water. (ASSAM TRIBUNE 100102)

### Linking rivers can affect ecology, warns WWF

World Wildlife Fund director General Claude Martin has voiced reservation on the Centre's plan to interconnect rivers and warned that linking rivers like pipelines without looking at the ecological impact could lead to serious repercussions. Dr Martin said a river is an ecosystem and one cannot think of connecting them like pipelines. Doing so could lead to rivers getting dried up or getting filled up with silt and sand. Stating that such engineering solutions are basically flawed, he said a river is more than just water; there is a lot of biodiversity in it for it sustains the livelihood of all species living in and around it. He said that the concept of integrated river basin management had emerged at Johannesburg conference. (THE HINDUSTAN TIMES 100203, RASHTRIYA SAHARA 110203)



The water resource minister of Bihar has suggested that the Centre should link the tributaries of major rivers rather than linking large rivers. He claimed that tributaries could be linked within 20% expense of total estimated cost for inter-linking project and 80% problems could be solved. (DAINIK HINDUSTAN 240103)



The fact that the decision of inter-linking of rivers has come in response to a suggestion to this effect by the Supreme Court does nothing to erode absurd irony of the situation. The suggestion to the Central govt on the inter-linkage of rivers is monumental for potential impact and contentiousness. The govt's assurance to the court that it will achieve this by the year 2016 is grossly delusory or plain stupid. Perhaps both. The govt could have pointed out to the Court that, beginning with the '60s the idea to connect to country's rivers has been talked about at regular intervals. It has been rejected each time, with incremental doubts about the feasibility and viability about the project.... The govt itself has indicated to the Court that even a working figure for the overall project (even on the absence of firm details) would be Rs 5600 B. This implies that the govt is committed to finding Rs 400 B every year for the next decade. There is serious credibility question on such a claim. Moreover, the 10<sup>th</sup> plan adopted by the govt has no provision for this. The govt claims that its engineering exercise will transfer 1500 cubic m of water per second, from the surplus rivers to the Deficit Rivers. On the other hand, official estimate indicate that floodwaters in the Ganga, Brahmaputra, Mahanadi, and

the Godavari add up to 30 000 cubic m at peak flow. This mismatch indicates that the inter-linking plan would be totally incapable of solving the annual flood problems in the country. Govt depts would point out that digging large canals displaces local populations whose resettlement creates all round misery. Hydrological officials of coastal states have already begun to express fears that the curtailment of river flows to the deltas would lead to a large scale ingression of saline water from the sea. Recent experience has shown ample proof that the revival of dead ideas can be dangerous and disastrous. The new lease-of-life to the idea of mega-linking of rivers is just that. (BUSINESS INDIA 6-190103 Editorial)

**Sub-groups to undertake preliminary studies** The first meeting of the task Force on Interlinking of Rivers appointed five sub-groups to study various aspects of the issue. The five sub-groups will study the economic viability, social issues, ecology, engineering and international dimensions. The Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad will be an adviser to the task force on organisational structure for implementation of the project. ICICI bank chief K V Kamath has been appointed the head of the sub-group to recommend the financing structure for the project. (THE HINDU 070103, BUSINESS STANDARD 100103)



The Central govt's plan to interlink the rivers, including the Brahmaputra, is poised to snowball into a major controversy in Assam with the Assam Gana Parishad and other regional parties opposing the move, terming it a deep-rooted conspiracy to deprive the people of the State their due share of water. AGP president Brindaban Goswami said "when the Centre constituted Task force, the drought in some states was given priority over Assam's annual scourge" and cautioned, "it was necessary to find out what impact it would have on Assam". He said that there is enough reason to believe that the interlinking of the rivers is aimed at supplying excess water to the dry states by depriving states like Assam. The All Assam Students' Union and Asom Jatiyabadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad too have expressed opposition to the proposal. (SENTINEL 300103, THE INDIAN EXPRESS 310103)



W Bengal Irrigation Minister has written a letter to central water Resources Minister, protesting against inter-linking rivers, stating that the said project will pose a "potential threat" to W Bengal. He has sent a report with the letter stating that the Ganga basin is the largest river basin in the country, and since W Bengal is located at the "tail end" of the basin, it is a "deficit state". (THE STATESMAN 230103)

### Private role in river linking: Agenda Exposed?

The Chairman of the task force of river linking has called upon the private sector to participate in the linking rivers across the country. He said the private sector could boost hydro electricity generation, navigation as well as irrigation projects by the participating in this project. The private sector companies can also form user forums and even supply water for these projects. He also mentioned that the govt would not approach any international funding agency to finance the projects. He claimed that the total resource required would be less than 1% of the GDP per year. (BUSINESS LINE 120203)



The NWDA budgets the entire project at ₹ 5600 B (\$112 B) at 2002 prices. But Mr Prabhu himself says it could go up to \$200 B. The Himalayan component of this plan would cost Rs 3750 B and the peninsular part,

Rs 1850 B. Where is the investible capital of this magnitude available in the domestic economy? The only option would be funds from international sources. Apart from the fact that this would place a debt of about \$112 on every Indian (where average annual income is \$400-\$800), it also raises question about how this loan is to be returned. Moreover, annual interest on this amount would range between Rs 200 B and Rs 300 B. (NEWSTIME 271102, THE HINDU 020203)



Deputy Prime Minister of India has said, "On the one hand, most of the rainwater flows into the sea without being harnessed; on the other, groundwater is depleting due to its over extraction. Proper harvesting of rainwater could solve domestic and agricultural water needs. RIGHT, Mr Advani. Why then, at the same meeting, of all places on rural water supply, you also advocated, "garland of rivers"? Its clearly not confusion that is leading to this double talk? (THE HINDU 061202)