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# River of discord

By Express News Service | Published: 07th July 2016 05:32 AM | Last Updated: 07th July 2016 05:32 AM

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It's a drinking water project that is ambitious in scale and purpose but whose course is riven by hurdles. The Yettinahole project, which has pitted coastal Karnataka against the southern Karnataka districts of Kolar and Chikkaballapur, is now being challenged at the principal bench of the National Green Tribunal in New Delhi.

The river diversion project has antagonised people on the coast who are trying to stop it, while those in the parched south hope it will alleviate water woes. Political observers see it as a threat to the integrity of Karnataka, environmentalists see it as a disaster in the making while politicians are making capital out of it on either side of the divide.



The central debate has been about the amount of water available at Yettinahole, one of the tributaries of the river Nethravathi, which flows into the Arabian Sea.

The Paramashivaiah Committee report, submitted in 1972, suggested tapping the 3,000 tmc ft draining into the sea. Noting that just 10 per cent of this water could irrigate 26 lakh acres, the report said the project could be taken up in an eco-friendly manner.

The Karnataka government woke up to the recommendations four decades later and announced its implementation. This led to a series of demonstrations for and against the project. Prof Muzaffar Assadi, Department of Political Science, University of Mysore, sees several complications. "The ramifications might possibly include the revival of the demand for a separate Tulu Nadu state," he said, recalling that the Cauvery dispute between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu had

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eventually led to the setting up of a tribunal.

The water crisis in several parts of south-interior Karnataka has been severe. In Kolar, Chikkaballapur and other districts, groundwater levels have plummeted to new lows.

In 2013, the government decided to take up the Yettinahole project "to meet the acute water crisis in Kolar, Chikkaballapur and Bengaluru Rural districts."

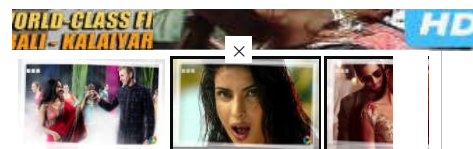
Water Resources Minister M B Patil had told the Legislative Council that water lifted from Yettinahole would feed canals connecting various lakes in the affected districts.

On September 13, 2015, former chief minister M Veerappa Moily had to face protesters waving slippers and black flags. After declaring his support for the project, he backed off, saying it was not his brainchild.

Other leaders have faced public wrath for the delay in implementing the project. According to Dinesh Holla, convenor of Sahyadri Samrakshana Sanchaya, the project would sound the death knell for the 148 km-long Nethravathi river.

In March this year, ryots from Kolar and Chikkaballapur districts protested in Bengaluru, following which the state said it would speed up the project. Irrigation expert C Narasimhappa has said it was the only ray of hope to prevent Kolar, Chikkaballapur and Bengaluru Rural districts from turning into deserts.

However, several scientists, like Prof T V Ramachandra of the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, believe the water shortage can be addressed by other means, such as rainwater harvesting. They have advised the government that the project will be disastrous to the environment.




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