

An Open Letter to the Stakeholders

Eureka! Eureka! The Indian government may feel proud to utter the words of Archimedes for, at last, it has discovered a novel idea – may be the old and much talked about idea by the parliamentarians – of building a national network of inland waterways to address the serious issues of flood, drought, water scarcity, power shortage and the like. The idea is to build national waterways just like the national highways. As a result, the artificially constructed inland waterways will be carrying water all over the nation, just as the veins carrying blood to different parts in the human body. What a gorgeous idea it is indeed!

About the Project:

According to the plan, the blueprints for interlinking Himalayan Rivers, Central Indian Rivers and Peninsular Rivers have already been prepared. As the Tamil Nadu state is located at the tail end of Indian peninsular, it is covered under Mahanadhi-Godhavari-Krishna-Pennar-Palar- Cauvery-Vaigai and Gundar linkage. These rivers are proposed to be interlinked under the Peninsular River Development Component of the National Perspective Plan formulated by the Government of India. The National Water Development Agency is entrusted with the task of investigation and preparation of project proposals for the peninsular rivers.

The National Water Development Agency has already prepared the pre-feasibility reports on Mahanadhi-Godhavari, Godhavari-krishna, Krishna-Pennar, Pennar-Cauvery and Cauveri-Vaigai-Gundar links. It has identified the surplus and the deficit river basins and assessed the surplus water available in Mahanadhi and Godhavari for transferring to Krishna, Pennar, Cauvery and Vaigai river basins.

According to the proposals, the surplus flows of water in Mahanadhi and Godhavari Rivers would be diverted to Pennar in Andhra Pradesh. Pennar and Cauvery would be linked by a 534 Km. long canal and 334 TMC of Pennarwater would be diverted from Somasilla reservoir to Grand Anicut built across Cauvery, via Palar. The link canal would provide drinking water and water for irrigation enroute in Andhra and Tamil Nadu.

Interlinking of intrastate rivers in Tamil Nadu:

The interlinking of rivers across states warrants huge political agendas of State Governments to be discussed before implementing interlinking projects. Therefore, the Task Force of the National River Linking Project is still deliberating. However, the Tamil Nadu government has taken a significant step forward to link the rivers within the state. It has come out with two projects to link rivers flowing within the territory, aimed at transferring the surplus water to the water deficit areas:

1. Cauvery-Agriyar-Koraiyar-Pambar-Vaigai and Gundar interlinking project
2. Thamiraparani-Karumeniyar-Nambiar interlinking project

Cauvery-Vaigai-Gundar river interlinking project:

On the 25th of June 2008, the chief minister Mr. Karunanithi took the first step to create a state river water grid by launching a project to build a barrage on the Cauvery at Kattalai village of Karur district. The Finance Minister Mr. Anbalagan has also announced in the assembly that the Kattalai barrage would be constructed at a cost of 165 crore.

Objectives:

- To maximise the use of water resources by diverting Cauvery floodwater from Kattalai to Agniyar, Vaigai and Gundar rivers, through a 255 Km. long artificially dug canal. The canal will link Ariyar and Koraiyar also – the two tributaries of Cauvery.

Expected outcome:

- This will help cultivation in 2, 20,424 acres in four drought prone districts – Pudukottai, Sivagangai, Ramanathapuram and Virudhunagar.
- The canal will recharge the water aquifers all along the pathway.
- The project will generate employment opportunities to the thousands of people.

Mode of execution:

The project will be executed in three phases.

Firstly, the Kattalai barrage – which will serve as the headwork structure for the link canal - will be constructed.

Secondly, the 255 Km. long canal will be dredged from Kattalai as far as Manimuthar river of Sivagangai district.

Thirdly, the canal will be extended from Manimuthar to Gundar.

Lands required for the project:

The project requires 2,228 hectares of patta land, 1,416 hectares of government land and 40 acres of forestland.

The salient features of the barrage and the canal:

- The new Kattalai barrage will be constructed 250 metres downstream from the existing Kattalai bed regulator.
- The barrage will be 1.3 Km. long.
- The Kattalai barrage will serve as a reservoir, which will store 1.4 TMC of water during monsoon and 5.4 TMC during floods.
- With the rise of water level, 940 hectares of land will be submerged under water.
- The canal will be 20.40 metre wide and 5 meter deep at its start-off; it will be 4.1 metre wide and 3.4 metre deep at its tail end.
- The total length of the canal will be 255.60 Km.

Budget estimated:

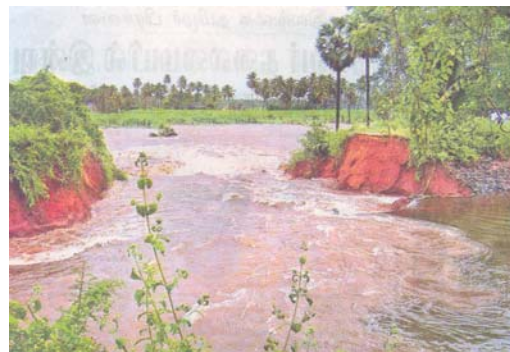
The whole project is expected to cost Rs. 3,750 crore. The cost of constructing the Kattalai barrage alone will cost Rs. 165 crore.

Foreword:

The real objective of development should be for creating an environment conducive for people to live out a happy, healthy and a long life or at least, it should help them lead a minimum dignified life with assured access to livelihood resources. Further, developmental process must be centred on the best interests of human beings. The Indian government - of course, all the governments headed by different political parties at different times – has devised a myriad number of programmes to alleviate poverty and has been implementing them, since 1952. However, unmindful of these developmental programmes and schemes, Mr. Poverty dares continue and prosper in the Indian Territory. What went wrong? What could be the reason for the failure of the programmes repeatedly planned? Is it a failure of the administrative set up or do they fail because of the existing social system? Thus, the government's poverty alleviation schemes and their failure raise many questions. In the same way, the project of interlinking of inland rivers in India too calls for a number of questions and clarifications. The stakeholders should respond – sincerely - to those queries before get on with the project.

To the Stakeholders...

- The studies and the analyses made on the cause and effect of flood clearly show that the destruction of surface water bodies, supply canals and the drainages, the encroachment in the catchments areas and the mismanagement of government agencies are the causes of floods – not only in the rural areas but also in the cities like Mumbai. All the findings show that flood, mostly, is a manmade disaster. The downpour does not cause flood, indeed – provided the water storage mechanisms are operated properly by the government.



- Indiscriminately in all areas, be it river irrigation area or well irrigation area, agricultural practices are declining due to water scarcity and as a result, there is a sharp decline in the agricultural produce. In reality, the farmers of the delta

districts are fighting, demanding adequate release of water in Cauvery every year. This is the perennial demand of the farmers cultivate at the tail end of Cauvery. When such is the fact, whose genius does compute the surplus flow of water in rivers?



நான்கு மாவட்டம் சீர்காழி அருகே திருச்செம்பள்ளி பகுதியில் 55 ஆயிரம் ஏக்கரில் சம்பா நெல் பயிரிடப்பட்டுள்ளது. காவிரியின் கடைமடை பகுதியான திருச்சி, போளிய தன்னளி வரத்து இல்லாததால் 40 ஆயிரம் ஏக்கர் நிலம் காய்ந்து, வெலத்தூக் விடக்கூடியது. (அடுத்தபடம்) சீர்காழி பகுதியில் திருவள்ளி, பெருந்தேவாட்டம் ஏரிகளில் இருந்து பாசனம் நடக்கிறது. காவிரியில் போளிய தன்னளி வரத்து இல்லை என்பதால், ஏரிகள் வறண்டு, அதன் மூலம் தன்னளிக் பெறும் காவலம்புடி வாங்க்களால் காய்ந்து விடக்கூடியது.

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NOVEMBER 18 | 2008 | TIRUCHY

Release Cauvery water for Karaikal: MP

Puducherry: Release six tmcft of water from Caurvery to Karaikal region, Prof M Ramadass said. The demand was based on the interim award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal as per the GO made with the Tamil Nadu Government on Nov 19, 1993. **ENS**

Samba crop starves for want of water

Little rain and inadequate supply in Cauvery system

Special Correspondent

TIRUVARUR: The samba paddy crop raised in the normal area of 1.08 lakh hectares in Tiruvavur district has started starving for want of water at several places, in the absence of the northeast monsoon rain and the inadequate water supply in the Cauvery river system of Vennar due to the poor storage in the Mettur dam.

Farmers have been urging the government to take urgent steps to get water from Karnataka to save the samba crop in the entire Cauvery delta region.

The crop is in various stages. It needs water in the Nanniam, Tiruthuraiipoondi, Tiruvavur, Muthupettai and Kottur blocks.

A senior official of the Agriculture Department told *The Hindu* on Tuesday that farmers had managed to raise the crop, through transplanta-

Farmers urge government to get water from Karnataka

Thaladi crop has been raised only on 19,500 hectares

tion and direct sowing, with whatever water available, and now they were facing problems in irrigating it at many places.

"Rain essential"

The problem could not be solved only with the river water; only a good spell of rain within a week could save the samba and thaladi crops. Farmers of Tiruthuraiipoondi and Muthupettai had raised the samba crop on 8,500 hectares through direct sowing.

Farmers have cultivated the thaladi crop (the second crop in the kuruvai-harvested

area) only on 19,500 hectares, against the normal 26,500 hectares.

Some have switched over to the system of rice intensification (SRI). About 19,000 hectares has come under the new system, against this year's target of 43,000 hectares.

The official said the average samba paddy production in Tiruvavur would be not less than six lakh tonnes, at the rate of six tonnes an hectare, from the 1.08 lakh hectares of cultivated area.

A cross-section of farmers said they were hoping for good rain in a week or so. In the meantime, they said, the government should ensure full supply of water in the Vennar river systems.

They also sought adequate and uninterrupted power supply for agricultural pumps to enable the farmers to tap the groundwater wherever possible.

- The tanks of Tamil Nadu, which receive water from rivers, remain overgrown with thorny bushes and wild plants inside. Only a few of the tanks are desilted every year – perhaps, the revenue records may speak something different. Naturally, this minimises the capacity of the tanks. The supply canals also remain either blocked by impediments or occupied by the rich farmers. Thus, the mingled mismanagement facilitates the tanks to receive a little volume of water even during floods. How do you assess the surplus water flow in rivers?
- Many of the irrigation tanks have become breeding grounds for houses and concrete structures. Several of them are under the encroachment of the people who have money, muscle and political power. The government administration - goaded by the High Court or Supreme Court – undertakes eviction operation. The



ched land (left) and being chased way by another (right) in the land retrieval

● HIGH DRAMA OVER 'ENCROACHMENT'

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Land retrieval demo leads to 175 arrests

ENS
Tiruchy, November 20

TENSE moments prevailed as a group of farmers, along with a section of the public, staged a land retrieval demonstration in Thiruvembur near here on Thursday. At least 175 persons were arrested.

According to sources, an extent of 133 acres of land in Kumbhakudi village panchayat in Thiruvembur union was encroached upon by a section of the people over the last 15 years. About 40 acres belonged to Burmese refugees, 65 acres were poramboke and 25 acres were Uppavari and Kattaru poramboke. Members of Vivasayigal Sangam, Vivasayigal Thozhilalar Sangam and CTU had been conducting demos since last year for retrieval of the entire en-

In no time the dispute snowballed and assumed the proportions of a group clash

crashed land.

Meanwhile, certain individuals obtained a stay order but started selling the land part by part. However, after the stay had expired, the members of various unions announced a land retrieval demonstration for Thursday.

Accordingly, members from various unions, including Vivasayigal Sangam State president Mohammed Ali, District Panchayat Committee member Raja, Vivasayigal Sangam District Sec-

retary Masthamani and others, gathered near the disputed site and forced their entry into the land by wrenching the barbed wire fencing.

As soon as they stepped into the disputed site about 200 persons who lay waiting, armed with arvuval and logs, chased them away. In no time the dispute snowballed and assumed the proportions of a group clash. At this stage police intervened and arrested 175 persons, including 46 women.

RDO V Mallika, Tahsildar Shanmuguraja, ADSP Nagarajan and others held talks with the agitators. The officials assured the agitators that the encroached land would be brought under government custody. The agitators dispersed after appealing to the officials to take action against the persons who chased them with arvuval.

irony here is the Madurai Bench of Tamil Nadu High Court that orders eviction of occupation from the surface water bodies in Madurai district, itself is built on an irrigation tank – which was irrigating a vast area of land once. It indicates the failure, malfunctioning, or impotency of the Town Planning Authority that failed to coordinate with the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and vice versa. The Court, the Town Planning Authority or the Pollution Control Board – are they not aware that an Environment Impact Assessment should be done before constructing a giant concrete structure on fertile land? Actually, the untapped water only runs in the river during monsoon and it seems to be the surplus water to the illusion of the government officials.

- Once, the rivers of Tamil Nadu were full of sand. The riverbed levels were higher than the drainage canal levels. This mechanism transferred the floodwater quickly, without causing any damage to the fields, crops and the habitats. Today, despite the environmental laws, the sand mafias burgle the sand – with the tacit support of politicians and officials. In course of time, the riverbed levels become lower than the drainage canal and supply canal levels. As the outlets are blocked by the (inhuman) human activity, the river watercourse causes breaches at the ill-maintained points on the banks and becomes disastrous. How do you attribute this human made disaster to the nature?

An illustration: There is a water regulator built on the riverbed of Kattalai at Mayanur in 1934. The Chief Engineer of the Water Resources Department of the Public Works Department had written to the government stating that the bed regulator was not effective in distributing water through the four channels downstream. Based on his ingenious report, it has been planned to build a new barrage, 250 metres downstream from the existing regulator. Kattalai is infamous for illegal quarrying of sand. Thousands of trucks were used to quarrying the sand, once. Due to the relentless people's movements against illegal sand mining, organised by AREDS, hundreds of trucks are engaged in quarrying sand today. The elders of this village say that the riverbed was five-foot deep 20 years ago but now, it is twenty-foot deep. Imagine the volume of sand that has been quarried. As the riverbed level lowered, the regulator has become crippled to supply water in the four channels. Instead of blaming manmade blunder that has made the regulator ineffective, the Chief Engineer ascribes the regulator.

- How prudent is it to block the river water with heightened barrier, instead of checking the illegal sand quarrying and enabling the existing regulator function effectively by preserving the sand resources? Is not it unscrupulous to allow the sand mafias to blunder the natural resources for making money on one hand and utilise 165 crore rupees of people's money to build a new barrage for balancing the loss on the other? Do not you have scruples?



When the new barrage is built, all the agricultural lands in Kattalai will be submerged in water. Therefore, the little sand that remains on the riverbed cannot be lifted. The miners being clever enough to understand this speed up the mining operation. They lift sand beyond the environmental norms. The landowners, being threatened by the loss of livelihood resources in the future, either sell their lands to the miners on bargained rate or handover them to the government on fixed rate. The destruction of natural resources is taking place at an alarming rate at Kattalai and the **Cauvery-Vaigai-Gundar River Interlinking Project** has expedited this destructive process.

We call upon the media persons, environmentalists, social activists, environmental lawyers and well-meaning government officials to witness the baneful and unsavoury act of the sand mafias at Kattalai.



- Agriculture is the prime livelihood of the people in Kattalai region. Due to the submergence of fertile lands in to the raising water level of Kattalai barrage, hundreds of families will be forced to displace from the villages - whereat they had been lived for ages - to other places. Their livelihood and the employment opportunity will be at stake. They have to carry the pans filled with concrete materials on their head that carried crops and food grains before – for earning their daily bread. Is this the way the project generate employment opportunities?
- Forced eviction will adversely affect the education of the children. The number of dropouts will increase. Even if they join some other institutions, it will disturb the emotional state of the children. Should the poor people bear the hardships and the inconveniences caused by the so-called developmental projects?
- According to the plan, a 255 Km. long canal will be dug artificially across the districts. It will wind through fertile fields and villages. It will result in the destruction of aurable lands and inland forests, and, forced eviction of people - once again. Do you say if at all there are developments, it should be at the cost of human life and natural resources?
- A tree is a tree to the naked eye but, it is a shelter for a variety of parasitic and saprophytic flora and fauna. Further, the root system of a tree retains a large quantity of water under ground. Thus, a tree with the surrounding environment serves as a resource for biodiversity. Felling out a tree means eliminating a source of biodiversity. Assess what happens when a wide range of trees, plants, herbs, shrubs and grass are uprooted and, soils are upturned all along the 255 Km. pathway.
- Already, the laying of four-way lane highway has destroyed a number of tanks, canals and ponds across the state. The age-old trees, which were planted on either side of the roads by the past rulers, constituted a certain percentage of trees in the plain forest of Tamil Nadu. The native rulers of today, with all their wisdom, are erasing out the traces of those trees in order to facilitate vehicular movement – for the sake of multinational companies. The environmentalists warn that at least 10 saplings must be planted for substituting a tree felled out. Instead, the present government is keen on laying tar and concrete roads above the ground, whereon thousands of trees stood sometime ago. Do not you feel you are accelerating the global warming process?
- The modern world came in to existence at a particular stage in the evolutionary process that took place over a million of years and the process is going on still. Because of the evolution, the globe possesses diverse geography with diverse climates – it has plains, mountains, oceans, rivers, lakes, estuaries, swamps, forests, deserts and the like; it has various animal and plant kingdoms that have adapted their own life pattern according to the climatic conditions of their habitats. Naturally, there are different ecologies and each one sustains with its typical ecological balance. Hence, the planet earth has a wide range of living

organisms - amphibian, terrestrial, arboreal, marine, and aquatic and the like. If this ecological balance is disturbed, negative impacts will crop up and we cannot measure the destructiveness of the impact. Abnormal and unusual but, mighty disasters that occur frequently due to the global warming across the world are the tangible indicators of such negative impacts. Are not you aware of that?

- We are getting different agricultural produce because of the prevalence of heterogeneous climatic conditions. If it is reversed artificially in to a homogeneous one, food diversity will be affected. It is crazy to think about changing a water deficit area in to a green pasture artificially. It is crazy to think of the globe having a homogeneous green cover. It is like reversing the evolutionary process, which is humanly impossible. Do you think it is possible just like you let the people use fair and lovely and gain fairness over six weeks?
- Over millions of years, the current patterns of river courses have evolved and each course has generated its own biodiversity. So, introducing water to areas that had never seen much water will create a negative impact on the environment – immediately.
- The quality of the water at a place is determined by the nature of the soil in the locality. The salt content – high or low - of the soil differs from place to place. When the high concentration of the salt is translocated artificially by the water current to a fertile area, the process of desertification will be accelerated and extended.
- Further, as the water is exposed to sunlight unusually, a considerable amount of water will be vapourised.
- The argument of water going waste in to the sera is absurd. It is the elementary knowledge that the sea is saline due to the confluence of different river waters that bring in various minerals present in the soil on their pathways. Therefore, if the river water flow is checked from entering in to the sea, the salinity of the sea will rise and as the consequence, the marine biodiversity will face extinction. Socially and economically speaking, extinction of marine species will create food insecurity. Does not it sound whimsical on the part of government to hold conferences on assuring food security on one hand, while erasing out the livelihood resources on the other?
- The estuaries play an important role in maintaining the maritime ecology. The mangroves and the swamps effectively store carbon and they are the shelters for diverse aquatic species of shrimps, crabs, fish and the like. If the fresh waters from the rivers are checked from entering in to the sea, the mangroves will die, the swamps will be dried and the organisms depended on these will become extinct.
- Furrowing of an artificial canal at a length of 255 Km. will not only destroy the fertile fields but also replace thousands of families forcibly. The eviction

operation will increase the number of destitute and make the citizens refugees in their own motherland. Already, the laying of four-way lane highway in India has generated a huge quantum of such refugees - besides ravaging the natural resources and the livelihood resources. This interlinking of rivers will add fuel to this burning issue of eviction.

- The government lays sophisticated network of highways with the loan amount offered by the World Bank. From the very first day of opening of the newly laid road for the vehicles, the government starts collecting levy from the motorists. In the very same manner, after constructing the network of waterways – with the loan obtained from the World Bank, as usual - the government may collect levy from the farmers.
- The sons and the daughters of Mother India are suffering under drinking water scarcity in most of the human habitats, be it rural or urban. However, as India is developing, people are endowed with the freedom to buy bottled mineral water on certain price. Since the market is flooded with different brands of water produced by different multinational companies, the Indians have the freedom of choice. After 60 years of independence, the Indian government has succeeded in transforming the drinking water in to a commodity available in the market. In the same way, the irrigation water may also be commoditised and the farmers may have to pay for water they procure for irrigating the lands. Do you call it as development?
- The main rivers of Tamil Nadu – Cauvery, Vaigai and Thamiraparani – were perennial before 20 years. Today, these rivers are running with a little water - that too in the rainy season – with high concentration of pollutants released out by the industries. The industrialists prefer fields located along the rivers for establishing their industries only because of the rich water resources available there. The industries, besides sucking out the ground water, drain their untreated effluents back in to the river. As a result, the remaining river water is contaminated and it causes serious damages to the consumers and the crops. Much has been written on the cause and effect of the notorious Coca-Cola in Plachimada of Kerala state, even then the market is flooded with the beverages. How should we call your attitude – callous or philistine?
- Further, the bottling plants, just for producing aerated soft drinks, exploit the natural fresh water resources unmindfully and leave them unfit for human consumption within a short time. They, either driven out by the people’s movements or seeking abundant fresh water resources, are on the look out new localities with high water table. Perhaps, the government may permit the multinational companies to install their bottling plants on the banks of the canal that interlinks Cauvery- Vaigai and Gundar. The Indian government is always so bounteous to help the people quench their thirst with sweetened beverages.
- Karur is located in the midst of towns, where hosieries and textile units are functioning aplenty. These units are using chemicals and dyes at high

Postscript:

History shows that rivers have belonged to the people and the communities and, not to the state. They remained and remain as the common public resources and, the habitats for many communities. People have had an intricate, indispensable and multi-faceted relationship with rivers. The people, because of this relationship, regarded the rivers, took care of them and preserved them. However, the government, unmindful of this fact, appropriates these common public resources under nationalised administration and defaces them on the pretext of developmental activities. The installation of big dams have already erased out the traces of rivers that were snaking through the picturesque landscapes in India.

Above all, it unscrupulously allows the private sectors and multinational companies to swindle these resources at their whims and fancies – for a few dollars more. On the one hand, due to the corrupt practices and malfunctioning of the government departments, the existing surface water bodies have become incapable of storing water to the stipulated level and on the other, they are blundered by the developmental measures of the government.

The farmers, environmentalists and social activists have organised a number of struggles against environmental pollution and for preserving water resources; the media have impugned the government. However, every attempt to check pollution, illegal sand mining and encroachments ended in fiasco because of the callous attitude of the government – the ultimate stakeholder. Unless the government withdraws its developmental plans - which are detrimental to the natural resources of the nation - and re-establish the relationship between the people and the rivers, serious disasters will hit the nation.



THE HINDU • WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2008

Rally against
pollution of rivers
By dyeing and bleaching units in Karur

40 கிராமங்களில் குடிநீர் தட்டுப்பாடு அபாயம்

கிருஷ்ணகிரி: கிருஷ்ணகிரி அருகே தென்பெண்ணை ஆற்றில் நீர்மட்டம் உத்தரவை மீறி மாட்டு

தென்பெண்ணையில் மணல் கடத்தல் எதிரொலி

கரண்டி எடுத்துவிட்டதால் பெங்களூருவில் இருந்து தென்பெண்ணையாற்றில் வரும் கழிவு நீர்

சட்டவிரோதமாக குறுமண் தோண்டப்படுவதை
தடைசெய்யக்கோரி உண்ணாவிரதம் 30.7.2008 சீக்கன்

தாத்தாக்குடி-ஆகஸ்ட் 29

மாதிரி அள்ளி வருகின்றனர். ட.மும். முறைவிட்டனர்.



My tomorrow depends
on what you do today

*“When we build, let us think
that we build forever;
Let it not for the present
delight nor the present use
alone,
Let it be such work as our
descendants will think of us
for.”*

- John Ruskin