

Farmers oppose curbs on groundwater usage

Santanu Banerjee ■ New Delhi

Even as the Union Water Resources Ministry is planning to introduce a tighter regulatory mechanism to check indiscriminate use of ground water resources, peasant associations are set to protest the move as they feel it would 'eliminate small and marginal farmers'.

Sources said that to check the 'indiscriminate use of water resources', the Government would resort to a two-pronged strategy - asking the States to bring in tighter regulation and enforce higher water rates for using irrigation facilities.

Sources in the Water

Resource Ministry said the need for a mechanism was felt as depletion of ground water level assumed an alarming proportion in recent months due to a bad and deficient monsoon. For higher water rates, a Planning Commission document suggested to the Water Resource Ministry to enforce more strictly the norms laid down in the National Water Policy 2002.

Sources said the Ministry would act according to the Planning Commission's suggestions both on revising higher water rates and tighter water regulation to check indiscriminate use of ground water and would like the States to fol-

low the examples of Maharashtra which has set up a Water Resources Regulatory Authority to regulate the water charges for irrigation.

However, the move is likely to face stiff resistance as water is a State Subject, and peasants organisations are bound to put pressure on the State administrations for maintaining status quo on power subsidy for irrigation. Speaking *The Pioneer*, Atul Kumar Anjaan, general secretary, All India Kisan Sabha, said: "Why other States should follow the Maharashtra initiative? If they want to recharge the ground water-level there are ways to do it by judiciously using rain

water instead of cutting on the subsidy or revising water rates."

"We will resist any such move as this is part of the strategy to eliminate about four crore small and marginal farmers," Anjaan said.

Though Ministry sources said that no final deadline is decided as yet on implementation of these mechanisms, but Water Resources Ministry has agreed with the Planning Commission suggestion that "Provision of free or subsidised power for agriculture in many States is one of the factors responsible for indiscriminate use of this resource (ground water).

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Reliving Nehru's dream of Panchayati Raj

Special Correspondent

JAIPUR: A mega-event for strengthening Panchayati Raj institutions will be organised at Nagaur in Rajasthan this coming Saturday as part of the golden jubilee celebrations of Panchayati Raj. A special attraction of the programme will be a rendition of Jawaharlal Nehru's recorded speech of 1959 in the town.

The programme, to be addressed by former Union Panchayati Raj Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar on

the birth anniversary of the country's first Prime Minister, has been titled "Nagaur chalo: Nehru ka sapna saakaar karo" (March to Nagaur: Realise the dream of Nehru). Mr. Nehru had laid the foundation of Panchayati Raj in Nagaur on October 2, 1959.

According to an official release here, the event will be organised jointly by Urmul Khejri Sansthan, Association of Local Governance of India, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, and the Nagaur Zila Parishad. Over 2,000 participants,

including elected representatives of panchayats and social activists, will gather at the Zila Parishad on November 14 morning and march to the huge ground with the "Nehru pulpit", from where Mr. Nehru had delivered his historic speech 50 years ago.

The release said a memorandum with the demand for ensuring people's active role in local self-governance will be debated and passed at the meeting and a plan of action formulated for strengthening the Panchayati Raj institutions.

Indian farmers beat Malthus

BUT 200 MILLION people are still food-insecure, says study

sunday special

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NEW DELHI: Although a grim Malthusian world - too many people vying for too little food - seems inevitable, some 5 billion people around the globe have escaped hunger.

British scholar Thomas Robert Malthus wrote in his *The Principles of Population* in 1798 that the demand for food inevitably becomes much greater than the supply of it, although he did not explain how he determined the growth patterns.

But 21 farm innovations - three of

them Indian - helped fight global hunger, said a report coinciding with the World Food Summit in Rome next week.

The Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in its study, *Millions Fed*, looked at some agricultural practices in India that helped beat the Malthusian theory.

But, according to the IFPRI Hunger Index, India has the largest number of hungry - more than 200 million food-insecure people. India's rank is 66th on a list of 88 countries.

The study found that India's national milk network and two particular farming methods - zero-tillage rice-wheat farming and customised crops for arid lands - pulled millions out of hunger.



■ India's national milk network and two farming innovations have helped pull millions of people out of hunger, a study by the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute has found. SATISH BATE/HT PHOTO

INDIA REAPS AS INDIA SOWS

THE THREE INNOVATIONS

- Zero-tillage farming: boosts yield, cuts costs, conserves soil and water
- Customised crops: Sorghum and pearl millet turn arid land into gold
- Milk network: India is largest producer of buffalo milk and sixth largest

producer of cow milk

MILES TO GO

- IFPRI Hunger Index ranks India 66th on a list of 88 countries
- More than 200 million people in India are food-insecure.

An estimated 6,20,000 farmers in north India adopted zero-tillage farming on about 1.76 million hectares, with average income gains of \$180-340 (Rs 8,460-Rs 15,980) per household per year, the study edited by David J. Spielman and Rajul Pandya-Lorch stated.

Zero-tilling means farmers do not plough their land, but put seeds straight into holes drilled in the land. "This also helps conserve water and preserve soil quality," Virender

Kumar, co-facilitator at Delhi's Rice-Wheat Consortium said.

The second Indian milestone is customising crops to make even arid lands profitable by growing sorghum and pearl millet. "Farmers can grow it with as little as 400-500 mm of rainfall or even less," the study said.

The study said India's mission to flood the country with milk by developing smallholder dairy cooperatives also helped diminish hunger. Till 2007, India was the largest milk pro-

ducer. Milk was a bigger contributor to gross domestic product than rice.

Gross domestic product, or GDP, is the final value of goods manufactured and services generated in a year.

The IFPRI report was commissioned by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to ascertain why "the proportion of people facing hunger dropped from about one third to one sixth since the late 50s".

NRCAF scheme to fight water scarcity in Bundelkhand

Santanu Banerjee ■ New Delhi

Spurred on by clearance of a special package for Bundelkhand region, the National Research Centre for Agro-Forestry (NRCAF) will soon recommend its watershed experiment in the 13 drought-prone districts of the region to tackle water scarcity there.

As the problems in Garhkundar-Dabar in Tikamgarh district of Madhya Pradesh were identical — water scarcity, low productivity, absence of industry, lack of employment and low education status — to that in Bundelkhand, the experience gained there would be utilised in solving the problems of water scarcity and alleviating poverty levels, sources said.

A report submitted by NRCAF to the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) recently, a little before the special Cabinet package of Rs 7,266 crore last week for the overall development of seven districts of Uttar Pradesh and six districts of Madhya Pradesh, is set to recommend developing watershed programmes for the entire red soil area which is 'red, rocky, shallow with low water holding capacity'.

Speaking to *The Pioneer* Dr SK Dhyani, Director, NRCAF, said, "As this happens to be the dominating soil position of Bundelkhand region, our recommendation should be included in the water development projects in the area which has the chronic water scarcity problem — both drinking and otherwise."



Incidentally, 44 per cent area dominated by black soil is prone to waterlogging and suffers from constriction and expansion, resulting in stickiness and cracks on drying. While the report says black soil makes agriculture operation difficult, "but we are working out an action plan how to get rid of these operational problems," said Dr Dhyani, adding, "We concentrated on the major and most dominating nature of the area's soil."

So far, Garhkundar-Dabar area watershed project covering an area of 850 hectares benefited about 191 households having a total population of 891. Sources said this "area however is only a fraction of the 7.16 million hectares and this watershed programme need to be expanded fast if basic problem of water scarcity has to be addressed."

However, it is not known yet if the recommendations of the NRCAF would be incorporated in the Cabinet approved special package.

Centre moots solar energy for remote, border villages

Sanat K Chakraborty ■ Guwahati

The Centre has mooted a National Solar Mission to electrify thousands of remote and border villages, which are unlikely to be ever connected with the conventional power grid.

The ambitious 'Solar Mission', which aims at generating 20,000 MW of solar power by 2022, is expected to be unveiled at the forthcoming 'Solar Energy Conclave' slated for January 11 next year in New Delhi.

According to a recent Planning Commission document, more than half of India's rural population does not have access to electricity, and even in those so-called electrified villages. Perennial problems of power outage and acute fluctuation of voltages of grid-based electricity make all this useless in most of the villages.

The Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has initiated several pilot projects in rural inaccessible villages of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand in collaboration with UNDP to provide electricity by harnessing Sun and Wind power.

Ministry of New and Renewable Energy Minister Farooq Abdullah, who was here to attend a two-day

conference on Energy Resources of Northeast India, said his Ministry was pressing for more investment in the unexplored sectors of renewable energy sources, such as Sun, hydro and wind.

"This (turning to non-conventional and renewable energy sources) not only provides clear energy options but also help reach out to remote locations of the country," Abdullah said.

He said northeastern States are particularly a good candidate for new energy solutions, which could be location specific.

For example, he said thousands of India's villages located, along international borders, do not have access to basic infrastructure — roads, electricity and connectivity — and are therefore, economically deprived.

"We are trying to promote development and use of renewable energy technologies to provide electricity to these areas," Abdullah said, adding that many of the villages on the India-Pakistan border areas have been illuminated.

Same thing will be done for hundreds of villages in the northeastern region, which shares long international borders with Nepal, Bhutan, Tibetan China, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

दैनिक जागरण

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विकेंद्रीकरण के अधूरे वायदों पर भारत डोगरा के विचार

पंचायतों की विफलता

पंचायत राज को सशक्त करने की बात तो बहुत होती है, पर इस क्षेत्र में प्रगति बहुत कम हुई है। विकेंद्रीकरण की सोच के तहत जो कार्यक्षेत्र पंचायतों को सौंपे जाने थे उनमें से बहुत कम ही पंचायतों तक पहुंच सके हैं। सवाल यह है कि ग्रामीण विकेंद्रीकरण व पंचायत राज सशक्तीकरण का कार्य एक बड़े जन-अभियान का रूप क्यों नहीं ले सका? यदि विकेंद्रीकरण के वायदे पूरे नहीं हो रहे थे तो लोगों ने बड़ी संख्या में आगे आकर यह मांग क्यों नहीं उठाई? यदि इन सवालों का उत्तर ईमानदारी से खोजा जाए तो यही पता चलेगा कि पंचायतों से भ्रष्टाचार के समाचार निरंतर मिलते रहते हैं और यही पंचायत राज की प्रगति में बड़ी बाधा है। अधिकांश गांवों में प्रधान/सरपंच व स्थानीय अधिकारियों में विकास कार्यों के बजट के एक बड़े हिस्से को हड़पने का मौन समझौता हो चुका है। जहां कमीशन ज्यादा जाता है वहां बजट ज्यादा मिलता है, जल्दी मिलता है। जब लोगों ने देखा कि पंचायत राज में भी पहले जैसी लूट चल रही है और विकास कार्यों के बजट से चंद व्यक्ति अपनी जेबें भर रहे हैं तो इसमें उनकी आस्था डगमगाने लगी। इस कारण पंचायत राज के समर्थन का जनाधार कम हुआ। पंचायत राज को मजबूत करना है तो अधिकार, आधार व आस्था, इन तीनों को जोड़ना पड़ेगा। पंचायतों के अधिकार क्षेत्र को बढ़ाने की मांग तभी स्वीकार होगी जब इस मांग को व्यापक जनाधार मिलेगा और यह तभी मिलेगा जब जनसाधारण की पंचायतों में आस्था गहरी होगी। अतः पंचायतों के अधिकार क्षेत्र को बढ़ाने की मांग के साथ-साथ पंचायतों से भ्रष्टाचार दूर करने के कार्य को आगे बढ़ाना बहुत जरूरी है।

पंचायतों के कार्य और अधिकार क्षेत्र में विस्तार तथा इसके लिए जरूरी वित्तीय संसाधन बढ़ाने की मांग लंबे समय से की जा रही है, पर इन बड़े हुए अधिकारों का उपयोग कितनी ईमानदारी से होगा, इस विषय पर चर्चा नहीं होती। जरूरत इस बात की है कि अधिकारों के साथ कर्तव्यों की बात भी उतनी ही मजबूती से उठाई जाए। जहां पंचायतों के अधिकारों को बलंद जरूर करना चाहिए वहीं पंचायत प्रतिनिधियों को चाहिए कि वे पारदर्शिता और ईमानदारी को सुनिश्चित करने की प्रतिबद्धता भी उतनी ही मजबूती से पूरी करें। अतः पंचायत राज के लिए केवल अधिकारों का ही नहीं, बल्कि अधिकारों व कर्तव्यों का मिला-जुला

घोषणापत्र होना चाहिए। इसमें ग्रामीण विकेंद्रीकरण को सशक्त करने की मांग के साथ-साथ पंचायतों में पारदर्शिता और ईमानदारी सुनिश्चित करने की दिशा में जरूरी कदम उठाने को भी महत्व दिया जाना चाहिए। पंचायत का एक अन्य यह कर्तव्य भी रेखांकित किया जाना चाहिए कि सबसे कमजोर व उपेक्षित तबके के परिवारों के हितों की रक्षा पर विशेष ध्यान दिया जाए और पंचायत में या ग्राम-सभा में उनकी आवाज को सदा सम्मान के साथ सुना जाए। इस तरह के अधिकार व कर्तव्य घोषणापत्र विभिन्न राज्यों में तैयार होने चाहिए। पंचायत चुनावों के समय उम्मीदवारों से स्पष्ट पूछना चाहिए कि वे ईमानदारी और पारदर्शिता सुनिश्चित करने के लिए क्या कदम उठाएंगे?

इसमें दो राय नहीं कि पंचायतों के बढ़ते अधिकार क्षेत्र में ईमानदारी और पारदर्शिता लाने में सामाजिक कार्यकर्ताओं की भी सार्थक भूमिका हो सकती है। यह निराशाजनक है कि सरकारी स्तर पर पंचायतों को सशक्त व पारदर्शी बनाने की बात तो बहुत की जाती है, पर कयनी और करनी में अंतर बड़ा है। अधिकारी भ्रष्टाचार दूर करने की बात तो खूब करते हैं, लेकिन व्यवहार में इसका उलटा ही होता है। पंचायत स्तर पर अधिकारी प्रधान-सरपंच को कमीशन देने का दबाव डाल रहे होते हैं। जो ज्यादा कमीशन देता है उसका काम पहले करते हैं। ईमानदार प्रधान के मार्ग में अधिकारी स्वयं बाधा उत्पन्न करते हैं। भूमि अधिग्रहण जैसे मामलों में प्रधान पर दबाव बनाया जाता है कि कुछ पैसा ले लो और गांव के हितों की उपेक्षा कर दो। पंचायतों व ग्रामसभा के अधिकारों में वृद्धि भी भ्रष्ट अधिकारियों व सरकारों को पसंद नहीं है। जब तक सरकार व प्रशासनिक अधिकारी बेईमानी का दामन नहीं छोड़ेंगे और अपनी कयनी और करनी के भेद को नहीं समाप्त करेंगे तब तक पंचायत राज सशक्तीकरण का जो सपना देखा जा रहा है वह कैसे पूरा होगा? अधिकार व आस्था को जोड़कर आधार बढ़ाया जाए तो सरकार को भी इस ओर ध्यान देना ही होगा। ग्रामसभा को सही अर्थों में सशक्त करने से ग्राम पंचायत को अधिक जिम्मेदार और ईमानदार बनाने में मदद मिलेगी। केंद्र सरकार ने वर्ष 2009-10 को ग्रामसभा वर्ष घोषित किया है। यह कदम सही दिशा में है। इस दौरान ग्रामसभा को मजबूत करने का वास्तविक प्रयास होना चाहिए।

(लेखक स्वतंत्र टिप्पणीकार हैं)