

have protests erupted again over Cauvery?

What is the agitation for?

Tamil Nadu, which witnessed State-wide protests over the ban on jallikattu in January last year, is again in agitation mode. On Thursday, the Opposition parties, led by the DMK, organised a bandh against the Centre's failure to frame a scheme to implement the Cauvery water-sharing agreement set out in the February 16 judgment. Last Saturday, the AIADMK government moved the Supreme Court to initiate contempt proceedings against the Centre for its "wilful disobedience" in not implementing the verdict.

What is the 'scheme'?

The 'scheme' is required for the implementation of the final order given by the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal in February 2007. While Tamil Nadu argues that the 'scheme' should have entailed setting up of the Cauvery Management Board and the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee, Karnataka says there is no mention of a 'board' in the court's order. Even on March 29, when the deadline lapsed, Tamil Nadu hoped against hope that the Centre would come out with a scheme, but that did not happen.

Why does TN want a Board?

The popular understanding is that the board, by itself, would ensure timely water release, as spelt out in the Tribunal's final order. The State's long-standing grouse against Karnataka is that it is not getting its share in right quantum and at the right time. This has been the situation despite the Tribunal's interim and final orders taking care of irrigation requirements.

Certain sections in the State felt aggrieved by the Supreme Court increasing Karnataka's share of water at the cost of Tamil Nadu. The overall share of Karnataka, which has gone up by 14.75 thousand million cubic feet (tmc ft), now stands at 284.75 tmc ft, whereas that of Tamil Nadu is 404.25 tmc ft. It has become handy for the critics of the Centre to allege that this is "yet another instance" of the Union government discriminating against Tamil Nadu. This argument is gaining attention in the absence of forceful articulation of a counter-view by the BJP.

Why did the Centre not oblige?

The Union government, in its clarificatory application filed in the Supreme Court after the deadline lapsed, referred to divergent views expressed by constituents of the Cauvery basin — Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Puducherry — over the judgment. Citing the Assembly elections in Karnataka and describing the Cauvery as a "very emotive issue" in that State, the Centre said the notification of a scheme at this juncture "would lead to massive public outrage, vitiate the election process and cause serious law and order problems." Seeking three more months, it wanted to know whether an implementation mechanism could be a "mixture of administrative and technical body," and could have functions, different from what had been recommended by the Tribunal in the February 2007 order.

Why is Cauvery important for T.N.?

Regarded as the lifeline of Tamil Nadu, the Cauvery is the only major river of the State, unlike Karnataka, the upper-riparian State in the river basin which also gets water from the Krishna and the Godavari.

The Cauvery also accounts for 70% of canal irrigation in Tamil Nadu. As many as 24.71 lakh acres have been recognised as the State's irrigated area under the Cauvery. In terms of paddy-sown area, the delta districts of Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Nagapattinam and four others, including Tiruchi and Pudukottai, account for nearly 40% of the total area in the State.

In terms of paddy production, they contribute 35% of the total crop. In 2014-15, of the 79.4 lakh tonnes of paddy, the seven districts produced 29.4 lakh tonnes. (Parts of Cuddalore, though considered part of the delta region, are not included here). In the past 10 years, the Cauvery has also become a major source of drinking water for a number of districts, including Ramanathapuram and parts of Madurai and Dindigul in the south and Vellore in the north, apart from central and western districts of the State.

T. Ramakrishnan

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