

SHARING DURING SCARCITY: ON KRISHNA AND GODAVARI RIVER MANAGEMENT BOARDS

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Dispute Redressal Mechanisms, and the Centre-State Relations

The [Union Ministry of Jal Shakti's gazette notification on the jurisdiction of the Krishna and Godavari River](#) Management Boards over projects and assets in the fields of irrigation and hydropower, though delayed, is a welcome development. The two river boards can now administer, regulate, operate and maintain 36 projects in the Krishna Basin and 71 in the Godavari to ensure judicious water use in [Andhra Pradesh and Telangana](#). The arrangement is expected to leave the working of Water Resources or Irrigation Department in the States intact. The seven-year delay to get the notification only reflects the tense equations between the two States over river water sharing. The States have been locked in a battle of sorts over the [utilisation of Krishna water](#), with Andhra Pradesh proposing a few projects, including a lift irrigation scheme for Rayalaseema, a region from where Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy hails, and, in turn, Telangana coming up with half-a-dozen projects of its own. Although the Union Minister of Jal Shakti, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat — the chairperson of the apex council of the two river boards — had said that the Centre would go ahead with notifying the jurisdiction of the boards, it took nine months to see whether a reluctant Telangana would fall in line. The seven-year-old State had held the view that the notification should flow from finalisation by a tribunal on Krishna water sharing by the two States that would enlarge the scope of reference of the existing Krishna Water Dispute Tribunal (KWDT)-II. Telangana had even moved the Supreme Court but the Centre said it would consider Telangana's request only if it withdrew its petition which it did. In the process, Telangana wanted its complaint to be referred to the current Tribunal to avoid duplication of inquiry.

The Centre must now see to it that the empowered Boards function in a fair manner, as the Union government's decision will be final with regard to matters concerning jurisdiction of the two bodies. Both States have their own justification to pursue new water and power projects as several areas await economic development. Rayalaseema is a dry region and it was grievances over poor utilisation of the two rivers in then undivided Andhra Pradesh that was a factor that led to the bifurcation. At the same time, the two States should instead focus on water and energy conservation and improving the efficiency of irrigation schemes and hydel reservoirs. Given the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the finances of the Centre and in States, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh do need to consider these alternatives and low-cost options. After studying the experiences of the revamped Boards, the Centre should look at turning the much talked-about concept of river basin organisations into a reality.

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