INTERBASIN WATER TRANSFER IN SOUTH INDIA - A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Introduction:

Water is more or less a renewable source, it's availability is largely determined by climatic conditions and technology that permits its exploitation, and also by the efficiency with which water is consumed and used. The concept of inter-linking of rivers through inter-basin water transfer from surplus river basins to water deficit basins was conceived for optimum development and utilization of water resources. In view of the looming water crisis, interlinking of Peninsular Rivers would prove to be a blessing one to the water starved areas and of course relief to the excess water areas in preventing devastation caused by flood.

Interlinking of Peninsular Rivers

The plans and estimates for Interlinking of Peninsular Rivers as part of a National Perspective Plan were prepared by the National Water Development Agency under the Ministry of Water Resources in 1980. the proposal contemplates linking of Mahanandhi, Godavari, Krishna, North Pennar, Palar, South Pennar, Cauvery, Vaigai and Gunder with 15 link canals. Peninsular river grid region is located from the Tabi river basin to Kanyakumari in the West and from the Mahanadi to Kanyakumari in the East. The link from Mahanadi to Godavari will be along the East Coast and will not involve any lift. The link between Godavari and Krishna will be partly by gravity and partly in the ultimate stage, by lifts of the order of 120 meters.

Dr. D. **RUDRAPPAN,** Dept. of Post-Graduate and Research Studies in Economics, Presidency College, Chennai - 600 005.
E-mail : rudrappan_d@rediffmail.com

The Peninsular grid begins from a place called Manibhadra in Cuttack district in Orissa where a dam is proposed to be built for storage and diversion of excess water in the Mahanadi, during the flood season. From this place a 900 km long canal is to be constructed for taking surplus waters to the Godavari at Dowlaiswaram barrage near Rajamundry in Andhra Pradesh. Water for irrigation enroute, the canal, will also be provided for.

From Dowlaiswaram, the excess water of both the Mahanadi and the Goadvari will be taken to the Prakasham Barrage across the Krishna rivre near Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh. Provision has also been made to transfer Godavari water to the Krishna from the proposed Inchampally Project upstream of Rajamundry. There is also a proposal to take Godavari waters from Polavaram on its bank to the Krishna. From the Krishna, a canal will take the water from this river, its flow augmented by the transfer of surplus waters from the Mahanadi and the Godavari, to the North Pennar river. Another canal from the Almati dam across the Krishna in Karnataka to the Somasila dam across South Pennar has also been proposed. From South Pennar, a canal will take water to the Grand Anaicut in the Cauvery. However, this is not the ultimate destination of the waters from the Mahanadi and the Godavari. From the Cauvery waters will flow to Gundar and the Vaigai further South.

Feasibility of the Project
Water in the Central List :

The most important aspect is the fact that the Constitution of India under Seventh Schedule, List 11, Entry 17 has allocated water as a subject to the States. As such, the States have more or less the final say in matters connected with irrigation, dam construction or hydro-electricity generation. Taking the extreme step of enacting a law in Parliament, under entry 56 making water, a national asset, could reverse this. Further, to facilitate early completion of feasibility reports of interlinking of rivers 3-D radar satellite imagery could also be used to save time for topo surveys and in evaluating alternative links of rivers.

Good Governance of Water :

Another fact to be remembered is that 85% to 90% of the river run-offs occur during the four monsoon months of a year, where as conditions of drought occur in over 80% of the country's land area, even if there is a shortfall in rains of only 25% from the national annual average. The proposed interlinking project would both mitigate the sufferings of people in the flood havoc regions of the Mahanadhi basin as well as the hardships of people in the drought-ravaged regions of southern and western parts of India. Obviously, these links, the dams and the reservoirs will result in displacement of a large numbers of people. In any case, the interlinking proposal will take full care of the project affected people by evolving a suitable rehabilitation package acceptable to the displaced people.

Conclusion

As stated above, besides providing immense benefits, interbasin water transfer is conceived to optimize the availability of water by promoting techno-economically feasible and environmentally sustainable development through storage and diversion of water from water rich to water-shortage and drought-prone areas. Irrespective of political boundaries, India needs to be looked as one single country. Leaving aside regional, cultural, linguistic differences and state boundaries, and with the active support of our President of India, Supreme Court, Central and State Governments, intelligentsia and the beneficiary community at large, it is hoped that the strategy of interbasin transfer of water would take concrete shape for implementation ensuring sustainable development of the country.

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