Sardar Sarovar and Gujarat's Water Crisis

What is the issue?

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- The current water crisis in Gujarat has been exacerbated by irrational and wasteful water use policies.
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- The famous Sardar Sarovar Reservoir on Narmada has also come under severe water strain, along with its other troubles.
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What is the water situation in Gujarat?

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- **Drought Situation -** Gujarat is experiencing a severe water crisis and many dams and reservoirs across the state are also drying up.
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- Central Water Commission (CWC) Data shows that all 27 major reservoirs in Gujarat and Maharashtra have recorded lower water levels than last year.
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- Additionally, it has also been found to be less than the average storage of last 10 years during the corresponding months.
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- **Sardar Sarovar Dam -** This helps to irrigate 1.8 million hectares, and benefit 1 million farmers through a canal network that runs 75,000 km.
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- With the onset of summer, water level at the Dam has dipped below the minimum drawdown level of 110.64 m, which 25 meters less than in Sep 2017.
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- Stretches of the canal network are now lying parched, and Gujarat farmers have been denied access to Narmada waters for agricultural purposes.
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- More strikingly, security personnel have been deployed along the main canals of the Dam to ensure that farmers do not illegally draw water.
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What are the reasons for the current situation?

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- **Deficient rainfall -** A substantial area of the Sardar Sarovar Dam's (SSD) and catchment area lies in Madhya Pradesh, which had a rainfall deficit.
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- Rainfall shortages in these areas affect the SSD storage as well as most of Narmada's drainage edifice in downstream Gujarat.
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- But Gujarat government has asserted that the allocation to the state is based on the total water availability in Narmada basin and not just the SSD.
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- Hence, it has been vouched that storage across reservoirs in Madhya Pradesh can rescue Gujarat from dire water strain.
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- **Irrational use -** Data show MP and Gujarat experienced deficit rainfall from August to November but no corrective water management plan was pushed.
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- The state seems to have drawn much water during Kharif, when it should have saved it for Rabi crop and the expected harsh summer.
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- Also, water for riverfront and other ceremonial occasions like the water flight could've been avoided as the monsoon failure was clear.
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- Significantly, officials have denied water release to the Sabarmati River front from Sardar Sarovar Dam (SSD) as some MLAs had asserted.
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- But water is released for Sabarmati River to cater to domestic, drinking water and industrial requirements of Ahmadabad city, through Vasna barrage.
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- **Unwarranted releases -** The timing of the release of water by upstream dams on the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh has come under criticism.
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- Notably, an unusual amount of water was released upstream of Sardar Sarovar (SSD) last September, prior to the inauguration of the SSD by PM Modi.
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- Official records show that the high water level was achieved on the inauguration day due to an unexplained release by the MP government.
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- This proved non-optimal and water levels in the reservoir increased till it reached its highest point in late-September, and then began to dip.
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What are the other troubles with Sardar Sarovar Project?

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- “Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal” provides for sharing electricity generated from SSD among MP (57%), Maharashtra (27%), and Gujarat (16%).
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- But there has been no power generation form the unit since June 2017 and Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra haven’t questioned this.
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- While Gujarat government usually supplies water for irrigation till June, it has now been stated there will be no Narmada water for irrigation till Monsoon.
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- The SSD authorities have also added that the government is not obligated to release water for the summer crop.
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- There have also been some doubts raised on the structure of the dam as multiple seepages have been noted, which officials are said to be working on.
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Source: Indian Express

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