Water Management in Cities - Bengaluru and Cauvery

What is the issue?

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- The recent SC verdict in Cauvery dispute made an additional allocation for Bengaluru, than in the earlier tribunal's order.
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- Click here to know more on the verdict
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- The principles adopted raises some serious questions on water management approach in the cities.
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What was the tribunals approach?

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- The SC mentioned that the tribunal had miscalculated Bengaluru’s water needs.
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- The tribunal argued that only 1/3rd of the city fell within the Cauvery basin, and so, only 1/3rd water demand would be met from the river.
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- Tribunal had also assumed that 50% of the drinking water requirements would be met by ground water.
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- However, increasing urbanisation and population has been depleting and contaminating groundwater, making it unusable.
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What was the SC's verdict?

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- The SC had ruled out the above principles and modified the directions of the

Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal.
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- It pointed out that the share of water for a basin State is for addressing the social and economic needs of its community as a whole.
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- The SC has overturned the one-third argument, saying that cities like Bengaluru deserve more water regardless of their location.
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- As it is the seat of intellectual excellence, especially in terms of information technology and commercial flourish.
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- The SC also dismissed the groundwater principle of the tribunal.
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- Therefore, it has, in effect, agreed that cities have the “right” to trans-boundary water supply.
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- The verdict thus offered an additional entitlement of 4.75 tmcft for the Bengaluru city.
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What are the shortfalls in the verdict?

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- **Groundwater** - The tribunal's idea was that groundwater could be replenished through natural recharge, stream flow and through lakes and reservoirs.
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- The SC's verdict, dismissing this principle, is of a serious concern.
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- Lakes were the sponges of the city, which would recharge groundwater and allow it to build on its rainwater endowment.
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- But Bengaluru is a classic case of a city that is deliberately and wilfully destroying its lakes.
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- The SC verdict has increasingly made Bengaluru less dependent on groundwater for its water supply.
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- This could further contribute to the careless management of the water reservoirs.
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- **Drinking Water** - The SC has also said that drinking water would get the

highest priority in terms of allocation.
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- In the west, people have moved away from agriculture and indeed away from rural to urban; water is used in cities and industries.
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- But in countries like India, a vast number of people still get their employment from agriculture and so water is used in rural areas.
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- Prioritising drinking water, above the demand of water by agriculture and food, amounts to a flawed approach.
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What should be done?

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- The economics of water and waste are crucial in cities of the global South.
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- The city should have been first made to use its own local water sources.
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- It should have then been made to meet the deficit from the imported and transported Cauvery water.
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- But the irony is that, increasingly depending on transported water is already making water so costly.
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- This is making more and more people switching to groundwater and overusing this source.
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- At this juncture, it is crucial that Bengaluru focuses on its water storages to improve the ground water source.
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- Only this could prove to be more sustainable than the additional allocation.
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- Another concern is that nearly 80% of the water that is demanded and supplied to Bengaluru is discharged in terms of waste.
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- The city has to plan now deliberately to take back this sewage water and to treat it, clean it and reuse it.
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Source: Business Standard

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