Water Theft in India

What is the issue?

\n\n

Illegal water trade is thriving in most Indian cities and is crippling most of the Indian cities' water distribution networks.

\n\n

What does the reports say?

\n\n

\n
- The Central Groundwater Board underlines that the water level has declined in 64% of the total monitoring wells.
\n
- A new study by researchers at IIT Guwahati reveals that only six out of 22 river basins in the country have the potential to cope with the threat of climate change, particularly droughts.
\n
- The NITI Aayog in its report on 'Composite Water Management Index' (2018) has underlined that nearly 600 million Indians faced high to extreme water stress.
\n
- It also quoted that about 2,00,000 died every year due to inadequate access to safe water.
\n
- The World Bank, in its report 'India's Water Economy: Bracing for a Turbulent Future', had clearly outlined that dams in India have the capacity to store only about 30 days of rainfall.
\n
- This shows that the water storage capacity of innumerable small water bodies has eventually declined due to centuries of neglect and mismanagement.
\n
- All these indicate that water stock is not adequate for future use in India.
\n
- However, the country's growing water scarcity is not only due to climate change and constant competing demand from various sectors, but due to

rampant water theft as well.
\n

\n\n

How does it happen?

\n\n

\n
- **Multinational Firms** - It is reported that many multinational beverages and packaged water business firms steal groundwater in many places.
\n
- The gram panchayat authorities in Palakad district of Kerala allege that a multinational company draws 6.5-15 lakh litres of groundwater per day against the permissible limit of 2.4 lakh litres.
\n
- Some multinational firms in Meghalaya, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan have reportedly suspended their bottling operations following massive protests by villagers.
\n
- Hotels, marriage halls, recreation clubs, manufacturing firms and building contractors in many areas lift water illegally from nearby ponds and lakes mostly during night, thereby reducing the availability of water for the poor and livestock.
\n
- **Residencies** - Residents in illegal multi-storied buildings and vast slums that are not connected to any official water pipelines are generally involved in stealing water.
\n
- For instance, a housing society in Mumbai, which did not possess any occupation certificate, was reportedly penalised by BMC in 2017 for stealing water from its pipelines for almost 25 years.
\n
- **Industrial Units** - About 2,000 to 10,000 private water tankers reportedly operate illegally on a daily basis in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai supplying loads of water mostly to industries.
\n
- It is estimated that as much as 50 lakh litres of groundwater is extracted by the tanker mafia daily and sold to industrial units and construction sites in Gurgaon.
\n
- According to the Centre for Science and Environment, around 20,000 illegal bore-wells were dug by tankers in Gurgaon.
\n

- This could be the main reason why the annual groundwater draft of 0.39 BCM (billion cubic meters) is very high in Delhi as against the net availability of 0.31 BCM as per CGWB data.
\n
- **Unaccounted water** – Analysis of various city development plans in India shows that water theft and unauthorised water connections gives rise to a high level of unaccounted water.
\n
- A recent study on Water Governance (2013) reveals that unaccounted water in Delhi amounts to around 50% of the total water pumped into the system, whereas it is 35-40% in Hyderabad and Bengaluru.
\n
- **Illegal diversion** - Water theft is so severe that in the worst situations, this can lead even to a lack of drinking water.
\n
- The World Bank in its report, 'The Challenge of Reducing Non-Revenue Water in Developing Countries', reveals that 48 million cubic meters of drinkable water escape daily from official supply networks, which is enough to provide water for 200 million people.
\n
- The same report on India had clearly highlighted that 40-60% of water in Mumbai is lost through illegal diversion.
\n

\n\n

What needs to be done?

\n\n

\n
- The major reason for theft and mismanagement is the availability of **cheap water** in India.
\n
- A study by the Asian Development Bank showed that the average water rates for all customers, including industrial, commercial and public customers is Rs. 4.90 per cubic meter and the average residential rates are still lower.
\n
- It is also reported that the country's thermal plants pay only for a very small amount of water although it is one of their primary raw materials.
\n
- Thus a series of measures need to be implemented on a war-footing to sensitise people about efficient use of water.
\n
- Water needs to be treated as an economic good and priced in a way that the

full capital investment plus the operation and maintenance costs come back to the system.
\n
- **Two tiers of pricing** could be followed wherein water for meeting basic needs should be provided at a minimum price or even given away free.
\n
- Beyond the basic needs there should be volumetric supply and pricing in the form of “the more the consumed, the higher the charge”.
\n
- Maharashtra’s Nashik district at the tail-end of Waghad Irrigation Project has implemented this successfully and it needs to be replicated nationally.
\n
- The latest CGWA guidelines make it mandatory for all industries to obtain No Objection Certificates from the CGWA.
\n
- It also says that industries have to recycle and reuse their waste-water in overexploited blocks and withdrawal of freshwater will be allowed only if groundwater recharge has been sufficient.
\n
- Thus, if these steps are followed strictly, the country may be able to minimise its water scarcity.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Business Line

\n\n

\n\n

\n

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering