

India's Impending Water Crisis

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Summary

In June 2019 a part of India has been facing severe water scarcity. Many of the reservoirs across the country do not have adequate water to satisfy the basic demands of the people, and a part of India is experiencing a drought like situation. This situation also affects India's growth.

Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, is facing a severe water crisis. From some localities, there are reports of violent clashes between the groups over the drawing and storing of water. The water situation has also led to a partial shutdown of the city's commercial [establishments](#). The Poondi reservoir, which supplies water to a large part of the city has almost dried up and groundwater has been [depleted](#). This is not a case with Chennai alone, some of the other parts of India are also facing a similar situation.

Looking at the water situation in the 91 reservoirs across India, the Central Water Commission (CWC) of India bulletin of 13 June 2019 stated that "live storage available in these reservoirs is 29.189 BCM (Billion Cubic Meters), which is 18 % of total live storage capacity of these reservoirs. However, last year the live storage available in these reservoirs for the corresponding period was 28.013 BCM and the average of last 10 years live storage was 28.972 [BCM](#)". Thus, for CWC, the live storage available in 91 reservoirs as per 13 June bulletin is 104 per cent of the live storage of corresponding period of last year and 101 per cent of average storage of average for the last 10 [years](#).

The water situation seems to be a bit better this year but not in all parts of the country. 27 major reservoirs in the Western Region, mainly in Gujarat and Maharashtra, "are together holding just 10 % of their combined storage capacity, well below their normal levels of 17 % for this time of the [year](#)". 31 reservoirs of the five South Indian States - Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana- hold only 11 per cent of their combined capacity as against a normal level of 15 per cent at this time of the [year](#). In western parts, the situation is worst in Maharashtra, where the total water in reservoirs is 68 per cent below [normal](#). In the South, Andhra Pradesh is worst where reservoirs are at 84 per cent below normal [storage](#). On the contrary, the reservoirs in northern, eastern and central parts of India are in a healthy [condition](#).

Foreboding the water scarcity, in its 2018 report, the National Institution for Transforming India, stated that India is facing its "worst water crisis in its history and millions of lives and livelihoods are under [threat](#)". It also maintained that by 2030 the country's water demand is projected to be twice the available supply, which implies that hundreds of millions of people will face a water scarcity situation. This situation will lead to a loss of 6 per cent in the country's Gross Domestic [Product](#).

Poor rainfall, the lack of irrigation infrastructure and improper water management are reasons for growing water scarcity in India. Besides, the increasing population of the country

puts pressure on available water resources. The demand for water is increasing every year due to the growing population while supply is getting affected due to climate change.

At present India, home to more than 18 per cent of the global population, has about 4 per cent of the world's water resources. In the coming years, the new report released by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs stated, as India is going to add more people, water scarcity seems imminent.

To address India's water woes, a new ministry called Jal Shakti (Water Power) has been introduced by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2019, merging the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. The motto of this new Ministry is "nal se jal" (piped water) to every household in the country in the next five years.

However, will the creation of a new Ministry solve India's water crisis? On this issue, environmentalist Rajinder Singh said that "This government lied about the cleaning of River Ganga. It promised to do so much about it. But nothing happened..... Thus they changed the name of the ministry to Jal Shakti. But how will they ensure piped water supply to all households when there is no water in the first [place](#)."

As the surface waters are inadequate, a large number of the Indian population depends on groundwater. It is estimated that in India about 253 BCM of groundwater is being extracted every year. This is about 25 per cent of the global groundwater [extraction](#).

To address the impending water crisis issue, the government is interlinking the rivers which has its side effects. There are many small steps which could be more effective in addressing the water woes in India. First, there is a need to manage the population growth. Second, there is a need to have an adequate number of water treatment plants in urban areas so that the used waters can be cleaned and reused. Third, a large number of water bodies are polluted in India. They have to be cleaned so that their waters can be used for various purposes. Fourth, there is a need to improve irrigation technologies and use high yielding seeds so that more crops can be grown in every drop of water. Fifth, water management practices at the local levels have to be encouraged. Sixth, people's attitude towards water use have to be changed.

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