

Need for Central Assistance for developing major irrigation project in Tamil Nadu

SHRI S. MUTHU MANI (Tamil Nadu): I wish to bring to the notice of the Government a serious situation, wherein the Southern districts of Tamil Nadu are facing a severe shortage of water for irrigation, because of the attitude of the Kerala Government.

The Centre is already working on the lines of having a Southern Water Grid to solve the water crisis. There have been talks and seminars on harnessing the water of west-flowing rivers in Kerala. But, here is a classic case where an existing irrigation project is facing danger. The Periyar River, which originates on the Western Ghats on the border of Madurai District was flowing waste into the Arabian Ocean. So, in 1895, the Britishers built a dam known as Periyar Dam at Tekkadi in Tamil Nadu, about 15 kilometres from my native place, Kanayagoundanpetti and the water course was diverted towards the east by digging a three-kilometre-long tunnel through mountains. Before this project was undertaken in 1886, an agreement was signed between the Madras Presidency and the Princely State of Travancore for 999 years. The water that was flowing waste into the sea, was thus harnessed and was let into the Vaigai river. This water has been used for irrigation for the last one century in the districts of Madurai, Dindigul, Pasumpon and Ramnad. Over two lakh acres of land is being irrigated by this projects. In over one lakh acres in the Madurai district two crops are raised every year. However, in 1973, a hue and cry was made in Kerala because of a report that had appeared in a Kerala daily that the Periyar Dam had become weak and it might collapse. Therefore, a Central team, comprising experts in engineering and irrigation, was sent to investigate the reports.

The Committee reported that the Dam was intact and there was no danger as such.

Yet, again, for reasons unknown, the Kerala Government raised the bogey of danger from the Dam. The Central team once again confirmed the findings about the Periyar Dam. Yet, because of the fear that had been created in Kerala, the Committee asked the Tamil Nadu Government to bring down the storing capacity from 152 ft. to 136 ft. and carry out some reinforcement in three stages. It said that the capacity could be increased to 140 ft., 145 ft. and 152 ft. respectively, after the completion of each stage of work. In good spirit, the Tamil Nadu Government has spent over Rs. 15 crores for reinforcing the dam structure. Even two years after the work was over, the Kerala Government is not permitting storage of water in the Periyar Dam beyond 136 ft.

Even if water is stored to the optimum level of 152 ft., only 48 ft. of water, that is up to a height of 104 ft., could be used by Tamil Nadu. Since the optimum level has been brought down to 136 ft., Tamil Nadu is able to get only half the quantity of water it was getting earlier.

SHRI VAYALAR RAVI (Kerala): Madam, it is an inter-State matter.

SHRI S. MUTHU MANI: Let me complete, please.

The quantity of water available is only half that was available earlier because at the level of 152 ft., the quantum of water is 15 TMC while at the level of 136 ft., it is just 8 TMC.

Because of the attitude of the Kerala Government, the Periyar-Vaigai Basin crops are facing danger. It will affect the farmers specifically and the State of Tamil Nadu at large. While over 40 TMC of water of the Periyar River ran into

the sea during the last monsoon, the Kerala Government did not allow Tamil Nadu to store just 15 TMC of water at the Periyar Dam. Had that been done, the farmers of Tamil Nadu would not be facing problems in raising crops now.

Only on the basis of a 999-year agreement, the World Bank extended a loan of Rs. 400 crores to Tamil Nadu to develop the irrigation systems like ayacuts and rivulets under the Periyar Dam Projects. The Tamil Nadu Government has spent nearly Rs. 600 crores on these irrigation development schemes.

While water is shared even among belligerent nations, warring principalities, here is a State in the Federation called India that refused to let a sister State store surplus water.

The farmers of Tamil Nadu, particularly, in the southern districts, are agitated over the issue. They are planning to picket the Central Government offices. The farmers feel that even on the Cauvery water issue, the Centre has not been fair to Tamil Nadu. The new Veeram Project, taken up by the hon. Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Dr. Puratchithalaivi Jayalalitha, to provide drinking water to Madras depends on our right to the Cauvery water because the Veeranam Lake gets water from the Coleroon, tributary of the Cauvery. It is most unfortunate that sister States, instead of following the dictum of "love thy neighbours", pursue a policy of "hate thy neighbours".

Therefore, I urge upon the Centre to take a serious view of this matter and prevail upon the Kerala Government to let it honour the agreement and give the legitimate right to Tamil Nadu to store 152 ft. of water in the Periyar Dam. The Centre should also prevail upon the Karnataka Government to honour the verdict of the Tribunal and abide by it.

Thank you, Madam.

SHRI VAYALAR RAVI: Madam, Deputy Speaker.....

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: "Deputy Chairman". You are in the Rajya Sabha now. (*Interruptions*). It takes some time to get used to this House.

SHRI VAYALAR RAVI: I went from the Lok Sabha to the Kerala Legislature and have come to the Rajya Sabha. It takes a little time to get used.

Madam, before I go on to the flood situation in Kerala, I hope you will permit me to make one sentence about the story made out by Mr. Muthu Mani. The facts are actually the other way round. They are taking water from the Periyar and Parambikulam without our knowledge. I am not for a confrontation. The Government of Kerala is ready to discuss and resolve the problem rather than adopting a confrontationalist attitude. I hope the Tamil Nadu Government will also adopt the course of mutual respect and understanding. I just wanted to mention that. It is an inter-State dispute and I think we should not quarrel here over that.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Actually, last year, when the Cauvery water dispute was going on, practically for fifteen days, our House was flooded with Cauvery water and there were discussions from all sides, by all political parties, and the differences were only on the State. For the first time I saw the different political parties joining hands to take up the Cauvery water dispute on the same platform. Since you have been added to this House, you will also join them.

Devastating flood situation in Kerala

SHRI VAYALAR RAVI (Kerala): Madam, the only thing I am suggesting to my hon. friend is that the Government of Kerala will be ready