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Canal that quenches Delhi's thirst

MUNAK CANAL A bone of contention between Haryana and Delhi, the water channel serves large parts of the city

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NEW DELHI: For the first time in years, Dwarka residents have had a summer when they got more water than previous years, and they have to thank the Munak Canal for it.

After years of impasse between the Haryana and the Delhi governments, the Dwarka Water Treatment Plant with a capacity of 40 MGD (million gallons a day) became functional this year after Haryana started releasing 80 MGD of water to meet Delhi's needs.

Dwarka residents are now a happy bunch, thanks to this extra water.

Activist Diwan Singh, who is a member of the Dwarka Water Bodies Committee and Yamuna Satyagraha, said the Munak canal has come as a blessing for the people of parched Dwarka.

"Now that water is coming from Munak and because of a few other projects that got completed recently, the situation has become so much better. Earlier, Dwarka was receiving not more than 3 million gallons of water per day. The rest was being extracted from illegal tube wells. After the Dwarka water treatment plant became functional in April, it brought a lot of relief," Singh said.

It is precisely to meet the drinking water needs of Delhi that the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), officials said, has been fighting it out in the Delhi High Court.

"We are finally getting water from Haryana and this has made the lives of lakhs of Delhiites easier. Our water treatment plants

are all functional and that has helped us tide over this summer without any major problems," said SS Yadav, DJB CEO.

As per the high court orders, ultra sonic meters have been installed at various points along the Munak Canal to ensure the flow of water is being maintained.

"Delhi is not asking for anything more than was agreed to in the 1996 MoU. The flow is to be maintained at 719 cusecs (one cubic foot per second). Once the canal was concretised, water lost because of seepage, which was earlier around 30%, is now 5% only. We save 25% water and this is the water that is being sent to the new water treatment plants. In fact, Delhi had planned the three new water treatment plants at Dwarka, Bawana and Okhla because of the water saved by concretising the canal," said a senior DJB official.

The Delhi government, to make sure that water lost to seepage is used to meet the need of Delhiites, paid ₹500 crore on the project to concretise the canal.

The 80 MGD of water sent to the three plants is serving nearly 40 lakh people, primarily in south-west and south Delhi.

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SS YADAV, DJB CEO

■ Though bathing and washing is strictly prohibited in the canal, villagers clean their buffaloes in the Munak Canal in Haryana.

VIRENDRA SINGH GOSAIN/HT PHOTO

LIFELINE TO DELHI

A look at the Munak Canal and the controversy around it

WHAT IS THE MUNAK CANAL?

A cemented water channel that carries water from Haryana to Haidarpur in Delhi

Length: 102 kilometers

Starting point: Munak in Haryana

FLASHBACK

- 1996: MoU signed between Delhi and Haryana govts to build a canal to carry Yamuna water to capital
- 2003: Work started on project
- A huge amount of water was lost due to seepage in transit as the canal was porous
- Canal was concretised to avoid seepage losses. Water amounting to 80 MGD* was saved
- Delhi paid ₹500 crore to Haryana for the project and demanded an extra 80 MGD of water
- Haryana has to release 719 cusecs of water to Delhi, as per a court order
- Haryana has to ensure the Wazirabad pond level is maintained at 674.5 feet

WHAT 80MGD WATER MEANS FOR DELHI

Areas that will benefit from the 80MGD water: South, Southwest, West and Northwest Delhi

DJB built water treatment plants to use the 80 MGD of water:

Dwarka in west Delhi: 40 MGD capacity

Bawana in northwest Delhi: 20 MGD capacity

Okhla in south Delhi: 20 MGD capacity

Capacity to reach nearly 40 lakh residents

POINTS OF CONTENTION

(past and present)

Who provides the 80 MGD savings from Munak canal after it is concretised to prevent seepage?

HARYANA VERSION: The 80 MGD is already part of the amount Delhi gets.

DELHI VERSION: The amount of water saved after seepage was stopped should come to Delhi.

Maintaining pond levels at Wazirabad and Haidarpur water treatment plants

Haryana is following this after a Supreme Court order. If the levels fall, the authorities are alerted.

A 'cut' made by DJB in Dwarka in the Delhi part of the Munak canal

HARYANA VERSION: The cut should be plugged so that water is not diverted elsewhere

DELHI VERSION: The cut was plugged after objections

face to face

R R JOWEL, principal secy, irrigation dept, Haryana

'There is no stand-off, Delhi is getting its share of water'

Rajesh Moudgil

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CHANDIGARH: The Haryana government maintains there is no stand-off with Delhi over the Munak canal and says it has been giving the capital its share.

What is the status of the stand-off on the Munak canal?

There is no stand-off in the context at all. Earlier, we were giving Delhi its share of water from Yamuna river through the Delhi sub-branch. Now we are giving it the same (719 cusecs of water) through the carrier-lined channel (CLC, which in Delhi is called Munak canal) and there is no stand-off. Delhi is demanding more water because of its increasing requirement and has also set up three more reservoirs to which Haryana is not under obligation to supply.

What is the Haryana government's objection?

While we supplied water to Delhi Jal

Board through the CLC, Delhi started taking water by puncturing it near Izajmatnagar, which we objected to and DJB plugged it. We are now supplying 719 cusecs water to Haidarpur, Wazirabad and Nangloi water works. The issue is that Delhi's requirement for more water has been on rise, though we have our limitations.

What is Delhi demanding and why?

There was a Supreme Court order in 1996 asking Haryana to give water to the full capacity of the Haidarpur and Wazirabad ponds. We have moved the apex court against this order though there has not been any hearing since. Since Delhi's requirement is increasing, other states should also share the burden of the national capital.

What is the impact of giving water to Delhi on Haryana?

We have to give Delhi its share of water and we are giving it, though Haryana itself is 40% water deficient.

■ *MGD: MILLION GALLONS A DAY. 1 MGD = 3785.411.8 LITRES

Keeping track of water released by Haryana: DJB

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NEW DELHI: A dialogue between the governments of Haryana and Delhi, according to Delhi Jal Board (DJB) officials, is the only way to now deal with the Munak Canal issue.

With the matter already being heard in the Delhi High Court, which ordered that a flow of 719 cusecs has to be maintained in the canal, dialogue is the only tool available if something goes wrong.

"This water is very important for Delhi as it is serving the very basic needs of nearly 40 lakh people. We don't want to fight with any state. All we want is for the terms under the memorandum of understanding to be followed," said a DJB official on condition of anonymity. The DJB chief, too, has made it clear that the Delhi government has been keeping a track of the amount of water being released by Haryana every few hours.

"Dialogue with our counterpart in Haryana is the only way to resolve the issue. The High Court order is very clear on the responsibilities of both states. If there is a problem, we will talk to Haryana," said Kapil Mishra, DJB chairperson.

Last week, the utility wrote to the flood

■ Kapil Mishra, DJB chairman

and irrigation department in Haryana after the water flow in the Yamuna was restricted and the water level in Wazirabad barrage dropped by two feet.

As per a Supreme Court order of 1996, it is Haryana's responsibility to maintain the water level at the barrage at 674.5 feet.

The Wazirabad barrage is among Delhi's biggest water source and is supplied water through the river's course via Haryana.

"After we wrote to them, the water level was restored soon enough. An amicable discussion is the only way to solve the disagreements that will crop up inevitably every now and then," the DJB official said.

spotcheck: Munak

At ground zero, water flows quietly amid row

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MUNAK (KARNAL): Two children, aged 16 and 18 years, take position and plunge into the water right next to a signpost that clearly prohibits diving.

After spending half an hour in the Munak Canal, they come out and say: "If we stop the water from here, your city (Delhi) will die of thirst."

Even children in the area around Munak in Haryana know what the canal water means to Delhi.

The canal has been a sore point between Haryana and Delhi for over a decade now with the tussle over the amount of water Delhi is supposed to get reaching even the High Court. Delhi recently started getting water from Haryana after the court orders.

The tussle is complicated but a visit to the Munak Canal's origin point clears the picture to some extent and throws light on some problems as well.

The record books at the office near the canal shows that 750 cusecs of water is being released everyday from here in the past one month, breathing life into the canal and the areas that surround it.

■ The starting point of the Munak Canal in Haryana.

VIRENDRA SINGH GOSAIN/HT PHOTO

"We have got orders from the authorities to release at least 719 cusecs of water in the newly constructed Munak Carrier Lined Channel (CLC) at any cost," said Shiv Charan Sharma, the official deployed at the Haryana irriga-

tion department office that controls the water released to Delhi.

As per the Delhi High Court's order, Haryana should supply 719 cusecs of water to the Munak CLC.

When asked how much water is flow-

ing in the Delhi sub-branch canal, which runs parallel to the CLC, he said: "In the past one month, it has been between 17,000 and 18,000 cusecs. It entirely depends on the demand and the instructions we get from senior authorities of the state. It could even be stopped."

As one moves further, there are boards with instructions that the canal water should not be used for bathing purposes but people use it to even clean their buffaloes. There are at least seven such points from Karnal to Bawana.

The problem gets worse when the water reaches Delhi through the Delhi sub-branch canal, also known as old canal — silt, garbage, puja items, plastic bags, lack of security for water meters, etc.

The canal urgently needs a barbed wire fence to prevent animals and humans from getting in.

The newly built CLC, on the other hand, has visibly clean water.

"It is very difficult to regulate the movement of people in the canal. We have placed signages. We tell people not to dirty the canal or jump into it but regulating it at all times is not easy," DJB CEO SS Yadav said.