

# Govt dithers on water price hike

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**JAIPUR:** Though the state government has taken steps to tackle water shortage, the issue of water pricing is untouched. Officials and ministers agree the rates need to be hiked, but admit since it is a sensitive issue, the government is vacillating.

The water rates for domestic as well as irrigation purposes were last revised in 1999.

According to an official of the Water Resources Department, a proposal is pending with the government since 2004.

"A proposal with new rates was sent to the government. In 2009, a revised proposal was sent. But nothing has been done."

Water Resources Minister Mahipal Maderna admits the government is in favour of pricing water as per use. "But it is a sensitive political issue and people have to be ready for it."

An engineer of the department said the total revenue from irrigation stands at a lit-

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M MADERNA, Water minister

tle less than ₹30 crore. According to the proposed revised rates, this would increase to ₹50.6 crore. "But realization of revenue is also a problem. Of the ₹30 crore, the government is able to get only around ₹15 crore as farmers are not paying."

Similarly, domestic water charges too have not been revised since 1999. Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has mentioned of 237 blocks, 201 are overexploited and in the dark zone. In dark zones, drawing of groundwater is banned, but farmers continue to dig borewells and draw take recklessly. The government needs to stop this water wastage.

Arvind Ojha of the Urmul Trust, Bikaner, says "One 500 litre water tanker costs ₹150 to

₹200 while the charge for domestic water is between Rs two to four per 1,000 litres. So who will think of saving water?"

The Indira Gandhi Canal Project is falling to mismanagement due to political pressures, he says. "The scheme was meant for irrigation, but now through lift canals, water is being given for drinking too."

Rajendra Singh of Tarun Bharat Sangh says the community has to be involved in the effort to conserve water.

Magsaysay awardee Singh, says, "I learnt traditional water harvesting and conservation from an old farmer in Gopalpura village in Thana Gazi block and involved the community to own and preserve water harvesting structures."

Tarun Bharat Sangh, has constructed 10,000 anicuts, *johads* and ponds in Alwar and other districts through community mobilisation. As a result of these efforts, the water table has risen.

Hira Lal Meena, a farmer in Sawantsar village, Alwar, says

building anicuts and protecting trees has benefitted everyone and villagers now understand the importance of conserving water. MP Meena, a former Gram Sabha chief in Gopalpura village says earlier people recklessly cut trees which depleted the green cover.

"Now the gram sabha fines anyone if they cut trees. We have also built seven anicuts, which have led to a rise in the water table." The Ramgarh Dam, once provided water for irrigation to Jaipur and up to Dausa, today lies dry due to unchecked building of anicuts and encroachments.

Similarly, the Amanishah Nallah, once the Daryawati river flowing through Jaipur, is today reduced to a drain, says Prof AK Sinha, head of the Water Resources and Management Centre at the University of Rajasthan.

It remains to be seen if the government can learn from past mistakes.