

Anicuts obstruct Bisalpur water flow

LIFELINE Despite above average rainfall it is only 19 per cent full

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BISALPUR: Is the Bisalpur dam, said to be the lifeline of Jaipur and Ajmer, being 'choked' by politics? This year, despite above average rainfall, the dam is only 19 per cent full and the water will last a year.

A visit to the dam site, about 160 km south of Jaipur, shows a huge body of water that stretches out into the horizon.

Even though there appears to be ample of water, the dam is 81 per cent empty, said an official of the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED). The Rs 715 crore dam has a total capacity of 24 trillion cubic metres (TMC) and provides water to about 50 lakh people in Ajmer, Jaipur and parts of Tonk district. Of the total, 16 TMC is reserved for drinking water and 8 TMC is for irrigation.

"This year, Tonk district had 750 mm rainfall. According to the hydrology report, the dam would get filled when there was average rainfall of 580 mm in the catchment area. But the abnormal number of anicuts has interrupted the inflow of water," said the official.

A report by the National Remote Sensing Centre, Hyderabad had shown that there



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are around 27,000 small, medium and big anicuts that have been built upstream of the dam, impeding water flow into the catchment area.

Officials blame the erroneous policy by the government that led to the mushrooming of anicuts. "Under political pressure, the government allowed the dams and anicuts. Around 500 anicuts were built in the last two-three years under NREGS," said an engineer in the PHED.

After the remote sensing report, the government put curbs on construction of new anicuts and dams in the state.

Prof AKSinha, who heads the Centre for Water Research and Management at the Rajasthan University, expressed concern that the constructions on the Bisalpur dam could lead to a situation similar to the Ramgarh dam. The dam, 35 km from Jaipur, was built in 1903 to provide irrigation water to Jaipur and up to Dausa. Later drinking water was also given. Over the years, anicuts were built and the 800 structures 'choked' the dam. Another pointer to the government's illogical planning that often compounds problems instead of solving them, is the

way the schemes for drinking water were sanctioned.

The total availability of drinking water is 16.2 TMC. "But after the Sohela incident in 2004, officials sanctioned drinking water schemes totalling 18.2 TMC," said an official.

Residents of Sohela village in Tonk district had blocked the highway demanding water from Bisalpur. Police opened fire on the protestors, killing some.

In the last 10 years, the dam has filled only in 2004 and 2006, leading some to question its hydrology report.

"The dam was built on 75 per cent reliability. But the basic premise is incorrect. Going by the trend of rainfall in the past 100 years, there has been drought in 50 years. Of the remaining, there has been normal rains in 30 years and above normal only in 20 years. The dam will fill only when there is above normal rainfall, so it will fill in only 20 of 100 years," said Prof MS Rathore, director, Centre for Environment and Development Studies.

However, engineers defend their turf. "The dam's hydrology is based on the rainfall in southern Rajasthan as water from Rajsamand, Chittorgarh, Bhilwara and Udaipur flow into the river.

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