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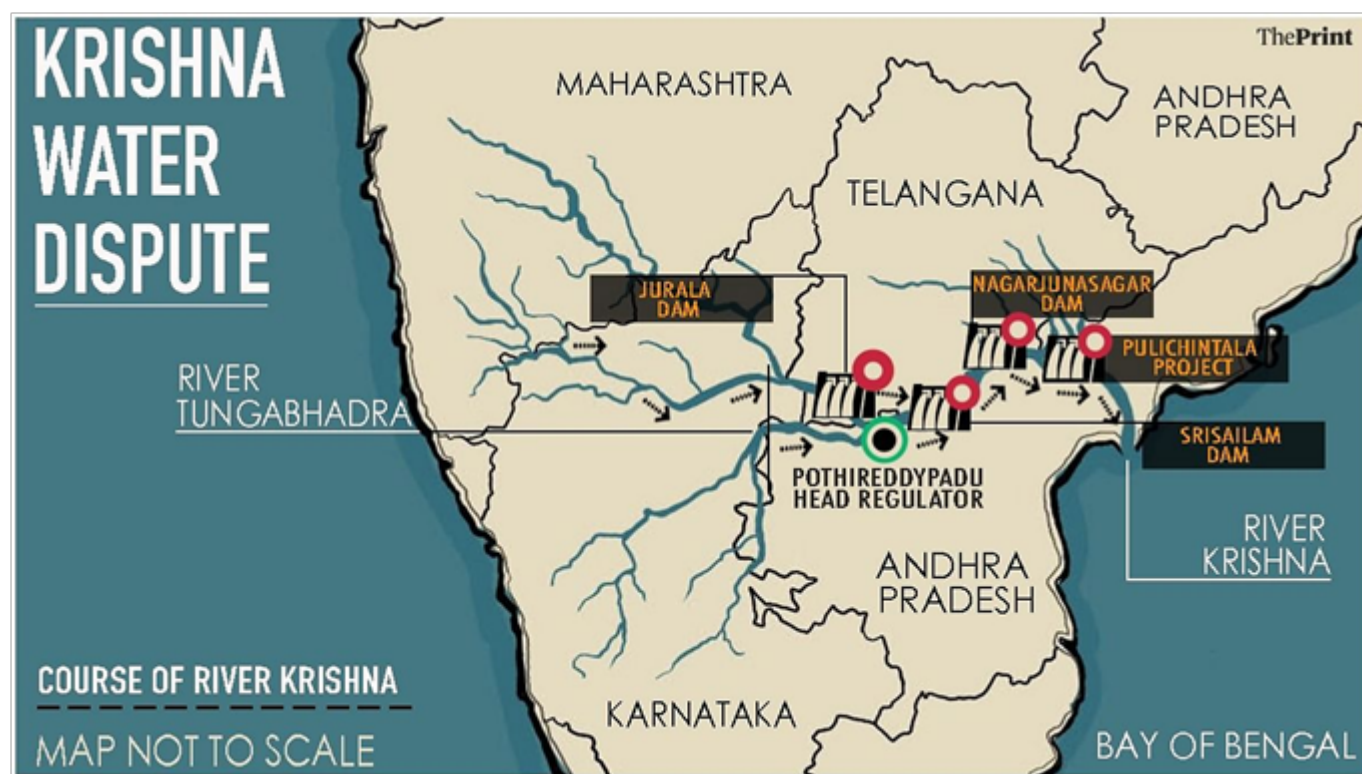
The Telangana- Andhra Pradesh water dispute

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Why in News: The nagging dispute over the water share of the Krishna river between Andhra Pradesh (A.P.) and Telangana remains unresolved, even nine years after the bifurcation of the combined State.

About Krishna River

The 1,400-km Krishna river flows east, from Mahabaleshwar in Maharashtra to the Bay of Bengal. It passes through Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, forming a part of the border between the latter two.



Origin of the Krishna water dispute

The dispute dates back to the formation of Andhra Pradesh in November, 1956.

Before the formation of Andhra Pradesh, four senior leaders each from different regions of Andhra, including the Rayalaseema Region and the Telangana region, signed a Gentlemen's Agreement on February 20, 1956.

Among others, one of the provisions of the agreement was the protection of Telangana's interests and needs with respect to the utilisation of water resources with equitable distribution based on treaties followed globally.

However, the focus of the combined dispensation with respect to irrigation facilities was on Andhra, which already had systems developed by the British at the cost of in-basin drought-prone areas in Telangana — a fact which was

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argued by the leaders of the latter region from the beginning.

Further on, in 1969, the Bachawat Tribunal (KWDT-I) was constituted to settle the dispute around water share among the riparian States of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh (before bifurcation).

The Tribunal allocated 811 tmcft dependable water to Andhra Pradesh. The Andhra Pradesh government later apportioned it in the 512:299 tmcft ratio between Andhra (including parts of Rayalaseema which comprise the Krishna Basin) and Telangana, respectively, based on the command area developed or utilisation mechanism established by then.

The Tribunal had also recommended taking the Tungabhadra Dam (a part of the Krishna Basin) water to the drought-prone Mahabubnagar area of Telangana. However, this was not followed through, giving birth to discontent among the people.

Telangana had time and again reiterated how it had been meted out with injustice in Andhra Pradesh when it came to the matter of distributing water resources.

The arrangement for water sharing after the bifurcation

There is no mention of water shares in the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014, since the KWDT-I Award, which was still in force, had not made any region-wise allocation.

At a meeting convened by the then Ministry of Water Resources in 2015, the two States had agreed for sharing water in the 34:66 (Telangana:A.P.) ratio as an ad hoc arrangement with the minutes clearly specifying that it has to be reviewed every year.

The arrangement in the Act was only for the management of water resources by setting up two Boards, the Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) and the Godavari River Management Board (GRMB).

The KRMB, however, continued the same ratio year after year in spite of the opposition by Telangana. In October 2020, Telangana raised its voice for an equal share, till water shares are finalised.

At a Board meeting held earlier this month, Telangana put its foot down for an equal share and refused to continue the existing arrangement. Unable to convince the member States, the river Board has referred the matter to the Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS).

Claims of each state

Telangana has been asking the Centre to finalise water shares from day one of its formation. Citing treaties and agreements followed globally in sharing river waters, Telangana has been arguing that as per the basin parameters, it is entitled for at least a 70% share in the allocation of the 811 tmcft.

Besides, it has been highlighting how Andhra Pradesh has been diverting about 300 tmcft water to the areas outside the basin from fluoride-affected and drought-prone areas within the basin in Telangana.

On the other hand, Andhra Pradesh has also been staking claim for a higher share of water to protect the interests of command areas already developed.

Stand of the Centre

The Centre has convened two meetings of the Apex Council comprising the Union Minister and Chief Ministers of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in 2016 and 2020 without making any attempt to deal with the issue.

Following a suggestion made by the MoJS in 2020, Telangana has withdrawn its petition over the issue in the Supreme Court as the Ministry had assured to refer the matter of water shares to a Tribunal.

However, the Centre has been sitting over the issue for over two years now even as the two States continue to spar over the matter day in and day out.