

‘Rail’ against these lines or our city may run dry

By Akhila Damodaran | Express News Service | Published: 05th March 2018 10:39 PM |

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BENGALURU: Petitions are being drafted and signed, and protestors are coming out into the streets of Kodagu against two railway lines that will cut through this plantation district. What is lesser known is that the proposed lines – Mysuru to Thalassery and Mysuru to Kushalnagar – will take a heavy toll on Bengaluru’s water supply.

Cauvery overflowing in Kodagu City’s main source of water is Cauvery and, this February, the Supreme Court increased our allocation from the river’s water to 4.75 TMC. The source of this river is Kodagu and, hence, any messing around with the catchment area – like cutting down about 2.5 lakhs of trees for the railway lines – will affect the flow of water into Bengaluru.

Congress spokesperson Brijesh Kalappa was also part of the legal team representing Karnataka in the Cauvery dispute. He says, “The river has 740 TMC of water and Kodagu, one of the main catchment areas, contributes 180 TMC of this water. We cannot say how much water we will lose due to this project but even a reduction of 1 TMC water will be disastrous. 1 TMC of water can take care of 15,000 acres of semi-dry land.”

FACTS ABOUT CAUVERY

River Cauvery is a rain-fed river, which is the lifeline of South India, flowing from its birth-place in Kodagu to the Bay of Bengal.

It’s catchment area, Kodagu, at 4108 square km has a forest cover of 32%, coffee estates of about 30% and 12% wetlands.

2015,
54,000
trees were cut for a high-tension power line to reach Kerala.

The river is not perennial anymore and does not flow in full to the sea. Currently, it is 100% saline at Nagipattanam and 60% at Thriuvapur.

“People in Bengaluru do not understand that the taps in their homes are connected to Coorg,” says S Vishwanath, water expert from Biome Trust. Kodagu is the water tank for Bengaluru because the city’s drinking water comes from Cauvery which is born in the district’s green cover, says environmentalist Sundar Muthanna. He says, “Already, the river has 40 per cent less water and the flow does not reach the Bay of Bengal. It dies about 20 km before the sea. These are warning signs,” he says, adding, “There is not enough water in Krishna Raja Sagara dam for us to survive if the monsoon fails this year. According to an IISc scientist, the city will run dry maybe in two years and definitely in a decade,” he says.

Bengaluru’s population is on the rise – from 16 lakhs in 1970 to 1 crore today and growing. Devika Devaiah, from Save River Cauvery, says that there is only enough water for one out of twenty families in the city now. “Eight crore people in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are dependent on this water and one crore are Bengalureans.”

Cauvery needs 33 per cent forest cover to rejuvenate, currently only 15 per cent of the cover remains. Ramya Bopayya, a volunteer with Save River Cauvery and Coorg Wildlife Society says, “Trees attract rainfall and retain water which slowly feeds into rivers. The trees help prevent soil

erosion. If they are cut, the river will start drying up. If there is no water available at the source, how will it be available to share? If we continue this way, the river will dry up by 2030.”

Tree expert Vijay Nishanth says that if trees such as African tulip, Jacaranda and Peltophorum, with their huge canopies, are cut down, we will feel the heat in Bengaluru. “And summer is nearing,” he says. “Loss of tree cover will definitely affect the water supply, and the government has not announced any plan to replace the lost green cover.” The government should support localised solutions such as rejuvenating borewell with rain-water harvesting and improving the green cover. “But they do not do it because these projects do not provide them lot of money. They rather invest in rail or highway projects,” says Sundar, who has started an online petition on change.org to stop the two railway projects.

On a TV channel, the BWSSB representative M Krishnappa agreed that water in Cauvery is reducing, and that they have plans to tap the Netravati. Devika says, “We’ve killed our lakes, we killed Arkavathy, now we’re saying let’s kill Cauvery and then look elsewhere: this is unfair. Today, the government says we have water security till 2033, which is only 15 years away... they should plan for 50 to 100 years from now.”

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