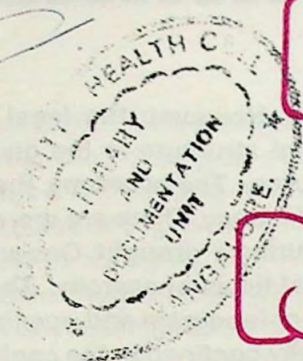




FACTS against MYTHS

VIKAS ADHYAYAN KENDRA

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INFORMATION BULLETIN

The Commerce & Politics of Droughts: The Myths on Drought and Drought Relief

"Once upon a time when the Nawabs ruled Avadh, the kingdom was experiencing a severe drought. As part of the drought relief programme the Nawabs decided to erect a palace in Lucknow. The people were provided with work and food. Even the nobles and high officials were provided with work. While the labourers were paid for raising the walls during the day, the nobles were paid for pulling down the walls at night. Everybody loved the drought!"

"In 1660, an administrative measure taken by Maharaja Raj Singh of Mewar endeared him to his subjects. On his demand a huge lake, the Rajasamand Lake, was built. He wanted a lake that would help his kingdom overcome water scarcity and avoid drought and famine. Not only did the lake protect his kingdom from this scarcity, but was a source of succour later for at least three or four districts of Rajasthan right up to modern times."

COMMENT



Droughts as well as measures to overcome it have existed right since ancient times. (See Box on next page) However, in the last 50 years there has been a sharp rise in its frequency and ferocity, assuming alarming proportions today. This year has been officially declared an all-India drought year as the drought has been the worst since 1987 with 50 starvation deaths being reported in Rajasthan where the worst hit are the Sahariya Adivasis of Baran district. Moreover, the rains this year till July-end has been less by 24 % (by the first week of August this had already increased to 30%.) One consequence of this is that marginal farmers have been experiencing a serious situation of unemployment. Over 24 crore-farm workers have failed to get any employment during the Kharif season. Hundreds are leaving their villages to take up petty jobs in small cities and towns. A number of farmers in the rich plains of Punjab are devising ways to raise cash in total desperation. Tractor bazars have been set up following huge losses where farmers have been selling the tractors used in ploughing their farms to raise money for meeting household expenses and save some portion of their harvest.



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Drought in Pre-Colonial India

In pre-colonial times attempts in controlling drought are scanty. However, the level of technological development, the economic conditions and the social structure in the given period determined their nature and the effectiveness of such measures. The economy, then, was not integrated and there was a considerable local level self-sufficiency. There are merely few indications of how people tried to cope or fend for themselves during a drought. One was the storage of grain when the harvest was good as a cushion against times of scarcity. They were partially helped by the rulers or private charity through supply of foodgrain and opening of 'anna chhatra' (free cooked meal centres). But these were generally confined to the capital city. There was the customary practice of granting partial and full remission of the land tax depending upon the extent of the crop failure and also to extend help to resume cultivation in the next season. As a permanent measure, the rulers undertook the work of constructing irrigation canals and gave loans for sinking wells. The rajas and sardars employed a number of villagers in different departments of the state, etc. It also imported grain from abroad and abolished tolls to facilitate its free movement but this movement was limited due to lack of mechanical transport facilities and in such severe conditions traditional use of animal power was very slow. However, in the event of a severe famine, the numbers relieved depended on the benevolence of the ruler and their capacity to reach the needy population. Special efforts were made for the return of the cultivators to their land and the rehabilitation of cultivation. As land tax was the major revenue, land restoration was the major task of the rulers. All this, however, changed with colonial occupation. Even though the possibilities of extending relief had vastly increased, the measures were now largely determined by the economics of such relief measures. The British colonial government did accept the responsibility to take measures, as far as possible, to protect the population of the distressed districts from starvation. Yet, it maintained, "...the task of saving life irrespective of the cost is one which is beyond their power to undertake..."² The results of such a policy are reflected in the records of deaths due to starvation during the major famines of the 19th century and the Bengal famine of 1942-43. In the early years of their rule they looked upon famines as isolated and unexpected events and dealt with the situation hesitatingly. However, they subsequently formulated a famine policy that emerged from the disastrous famine of 1866, known as the Orissa Famine, the turning point in the history of Indian famines. In 1880 it formulated a number of principles in correct management of famines and preventive measures. How to apply these principles was codified in the Famine Code. Broad instructions of action and practical instruction of relief operations are listed in the Code and have been in use till date.

Quick to capitalise on this situation village moneylenders have hiked rates of interests on loans to exorbitant limits. Besides, on an average, 1,000 sq. kilometers of land (about the size of Mumbai) is declared drought-prone each year. And around 6,000 million tonnes of topsoil, containing rich plant nutrients vital for the fertility and moisture content of the land, is washed away annually. Latest information by the Hyderabad based National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) reveal that 75 m. hectares (mha) are drought prone and the country is gradually turning into a parched and unproductive land mass¹. In 1974, when the Union government launched the Drought Prone Areas Development Programme, 50 mha of land was under drought. In the 90s it rose to 80 mha. This year, conservative estimates put it at an additional 7-10 mha of moisture-strained land. Another disturbing factor is that the country's finite and fragile water resources are stressed and depleting. The situation is already critical at river basins and local levels; 6 of India's 20 major

river basins have less than 1,000 cubic meters per year and localised shortages are endemic in all according to a report in the Outlook magazine of May 8, 2000.

As a term, drought generally refers to a deficiency in rain and its consequences but its quantitative definitions vary across countries. (See Box on pg.3). Its description is totally dependent on local conditions and local levels of water use. Under monsoon weather conditions, determining what exactly be defined as drought is a complex issue. For official purposes of declaring drought, a 25% to 50% departure from normal rainfall considered moderate drought, while a departure greater than 50% is considered serious drought³ According one study, the Weather Bureau of the US defined drought as a "lack of rainfall so great and long continued as to affect injuriously the plant and animal life of a place and to deplete water supplies..." In Egypt those years which do not bring a flood in the Nile River are considered drought years. In India, conversely, floods have almost become the prerequisite for drought.

What is Drought?

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) defines a drought as one in which the rainfall over a meteorological sub-division (of which there are 36 in the country) is deficient by 25% or more from the long-term average (LTA). If the deficiency exceeds 50% by IMD categories it as a severe drought. Accordingly, the National Commission on Agriculture has defined the other kind of droughts as hydrological and agricultural. The former is one in which prolonged meteorological drought results in the depletion of surface water and a fall in groundwater levels, causing severe shortage of water for livestock and human needs. An agricultural drought is defined as a period of four consecutive weeks (of severe meteorological drought) with rainfall deficiency of over 50% of the LTA or with a weekly rainfall of 5 cm or less during the 'kharif' season – mid-May to mid-October – or six such consecutive weeks during the rest of the year. In practice, states may adopt different criteria in defining a drought. Generally, if 50% or more of the standing crop in a particular district is destroyed or damaged that district is declared as drought-hit

An agricultural drought is a condition specific to a region and a local condition may vary. The responsibility of announcing a drought lies at the district level. The Centre has no role to play in announcing drought conditions. The district revenue department makes the assessment of crop loss, and based on these results, the decision is taken. Once relief measures, the prerogative of States, are announced

- ✖ Revenue collection for the region is suspended;
- ✖ Interest on loans is waived;
- ✖ Loan recovery is either stalled or staggered for a certain period. The next set of measures include providing relief. This is where the Centre comes in. There are two sources of funds to take care of the calamity – the Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) and the National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCP). While the former is a state-administered fund (the Centre contributes 75% of the corpus of the fund for each state) the latter is a Central fund. The CRF has Rs.11,000 crore for 5 years for all states, while the NCCF has a corpus of Rs.500 crore.
- ✖ food for work programmes
- ✖ direct cash relief and aid for damage to crop, livestock, etc

Drought is a phenomenon that societies the world over have experienced from time to time. What has differed is the human response to this challenge vis-à-vis coping mechanisms. When and where wise land and water management principles and policies were adopted, as the second quote (above) illustrates, and when scarce basic resources distributed in a spirit of equality, problems arising out of drought situation have been kept to the minimum. In this way people have lived through periodic droughts without any serious disruption of their lives. But at times and in places where such wisdom and good sense have been ignored, extreme distress had been experienced sometimes culminated in mass starvation deaths. Today, when drought strikes the knee-jerk response is to apply short-term crisis management measures, a "legacy" from colonial times. One way it does this is stock up food grains during good years and organises massive relief works during drought. The poor then get some money to buy the grains they need for their survival, which alleviates the problem of starvation but

nothing more. This approach only meets a part of their needs – fodder for animals and drinking water. To further cope with this problem the government provides a number of relief packages to affected areas. Thus, to this day, the government's response continues to be based on short-term rather than long-term permanent measures.

Once a State is declared drought-affected relief measures however do not automatically kick in but typically these States act on these fronts. Crop-loss compensation varies depending on the nature of the farmer's holding. On average Rs.1,000 per acre is sanctioned for un-irrigated land, Rs.2,500 per acre for irrigated land, and Rs.4,000 per acre for irrigated land with perennial crops. This only addresses the concerns of land-owning farmers; some of the worst-hit are agri-labourers. To tackle this, Food-For-Work programmes are undertaken by the food ministry and the department of rural development, paying half the wages in foodgrains and the other half in cash.

In the current drought and water scarcity situation three major trends in the area of irrigation and supply of safe drinking water are discernable. One relates to the large number of schemes left incomplete or inoperational (often due to lack of spare parts or need for minor repairs). Villages may have lift irrigation projects but many not providing any water or loans for villagers in digging wells progressed to the stage of empty ditches. One researcher¹ found 9,728 wells lying unused in district against 5,534 in use. The second trend relates, ironically not to inefficiency but over-efficiency in pumping out scarce supplies of water by a small number of big landowners to grow water-intensive crops in an area whose limited water-endowment cannot really sustain the new cropping patterns. In other words, the enrichment of a few arising from their favored access to a scarce resource often accentuate the water crisis of the majority of the people and hence diminishing their ability to face drought situations;

Finally, the total neglect of traditional irrigation systems which were often more useful from the view of sustained availability of water. In some regions, the area under irrigation by tanks had declined from 40,000 hectares in 1960-61 to 7481 in 1976-77. This is the plight of the Rajasamand Lake, cited in the quote above

The combined pressure of the first two factors can be seen, among other parts, where the neglect of tanks and emphasis on digging tube-wells by better-off farmers on land not really suitable for this has led to a lowering of the water-table. Thus, the two processes – one the modern irrigation system replacing the traditional forms instead of supplementing them and two, the derelict condition of the traditional forms of irrigation have combined to knock out whatever insurance measures the community had developed over centuries of struggle with nature. This situation is further compounded by concentration of the ownership of land and specially the more fertile and irrigated part of the land, in the hands of the powerful few. Land-ownership in the hands of a few is land scarcity for the many. Land concentration is not accidental being linked to the experience of colonialism and the development policies subsequently adopted by post-colonial governments.

In terms of impact droughts have are highly debilitating economically and socially. Its socio-psychological implications may not, however, be as obvious even though a drought can have an equally profound effect. And as it leads to scarcity, droughts often result in social disorganisation, affecting the individual, the family, children and the country as a whole. Firstly, there is an extreme narrowing of interests. Water becomes the be-all and end-all of daily-life activities. Men, women and even children are constantly in search for water. In conditions of deteriorating health like infant and maternal under-nourishment and disease, droughts merely exacerbate this situation resulting in a population that is too weak to recover either

economically or physically and realise their full physical and mental potential even after the conditions return to normal. Further, the drought precipitates migration of people from rural to urban cities. While this imposes further pressures on already overcrowded urban centres it leaves the rural areas with the old, very young and the infirm, unable to migrate. Related to this is the distress sale of land and livestock by people wishing to move out at minimum prices owing to their inability to provide water and fodder to their livestock. At another level, when the rains fail groundwater levels in the region drop precariously leading to an equally alarmingly concentration of fluoride levels. The result is fluorosis caused by the fluoride pumped up from the bowels of the earth through the tube well. One major impact of this is premature aging among the people. Rajasthan tops the list of fluorosis-infected states (40 contaminated and 22 of the 32 districts affected) with almost all residents suffering from yellow, cracked teeth and pronounced limps.

Drought and the resultant scarcity also lead to social conflicts between communities and castes over access to water. In 2000 water-riots erupted in Gujarat and M.P. over water scarcity. There is also hoarding of food and the attendant inflation of prices. Further women with their inferior social status are amongst the worst sufferers in conditions of drought. They have to go without food so as to ensure that the males in the family not only get adequate diet but also get to eat first.

Compounding the misery are the adverse impact of the economic reforms, exacerbating the state of the economy vis-à-vis the people. The reforms have also added a disturbing dimension hitherto absent in that as a dreaded reality for poor farmers droughts are now seen as a bonanza for trade and industry, not just for politicians. The industry, therefore, has expressed serious concern at the failure of the rains! The long dry spell has affected its grandiose plans of entering into rural India thus upsetting its marketing plans of targeting the rural elite. And the companies eyeing the rural countryside belong to sectors as diverse as cement, sugar, automobiles, textiles, fertilisers, chemicals and food processing. The more the damage to crop production, the less will be the farmer's ability to buy, and that will surely impair the recession-hit industry. Further, with an economy already in the state of atrophy, the drought will enormously reduce the purchasing power for industrial goods, further aggravating the crisis in the manufacturing sector. The rural market is estimated² to be around Rs.50,000 crores for FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods e.g. soap, etc.); Rs.45,000 crores for seeds, fertilisers/pesticides, farm equipment and tractors; and Rs.7,000 crores for consumer durable like Videos, refrigerators, etc. The CMIE has now dropped its prediction of GDP growth for the current year from 4.5% to 3.5%. A severe drought will only act to further the recession in the economy

vis-à-vis unemployment. Thus, for a change, it is the industry which appears to be reeling more under the impact of drought! This new element of the negative impact that the industry is faced with has pushed the poor farmer into the background.

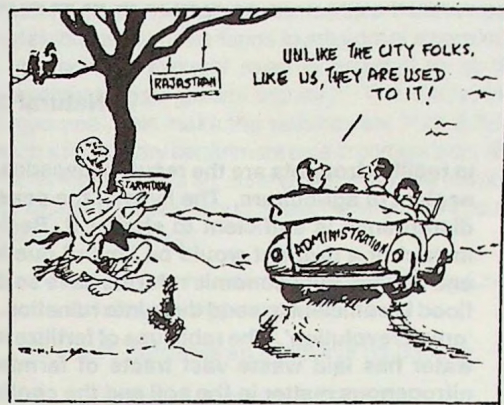
In pursuing merely short-term solutions in combating drought the Government at the Centre as well at the State is really not serious in providing any genuine relief to drought affected people through greater public investment i.e. reducing the variability in output itself that has much greater benefit in preventing drought.⁶ Only the amounts due under various 'relief fund' programmes have been disbursed. Funds from the Calamity Relief Fund have already been given (75%) to the respective States, even before the drought-like conditions occurred! The second installment of merely Rs.700 crores was realised recently from the CRF fund. The disbursement of such funds is a politically motivated stratagem. Barely 10% actually reaches those to whom it is meant for! The bulk is pocketed by vested interests. In 2001, the compensation of Rs.1,181 crores given for calamity-affected crops Gujarat received Rs.770 crores. Today, according to reports, in UP no relief is going to those areas, which are the opposition's stamping ground. Besides, it creates the misimpression that droughts are natural calamities and thus a 'fait accompli'. All that can be done is to hold mass prayer gatherings and invocations to the gods which politicians organise regularly hoodwinking the gullible sections of society. It is imperative therefore to lay bare such chicaneries and also distinguish between droughts that are real and those that are rigged.

MYTH: Drought is a natural calamity and therefore unavoidable.

FACT: This is an over-simplified understanding of drought. Analyses of data from various parts of the country reveal that scarcity of water as well as food and fodder has been occurring systematically over a longer timespan and even during years of normal rainfall.

drought is not a catastrophe! It is a process that must be effectively managed. As part of this process communities attempt and anticipate the crisis. They often do so by taking measures to conserve and harvest water. Water use is regulated. Where the ecology is fragile, farmers desist from planting water-intensive crops like sugarcane and rice. A number of villages have proven that this system works e.g. in the Alwar district of Rajasthan and the Jhabua district of M.P.

The problem of drought is therefore rooted in water mismanagement. In most parts of the country the local administration responsible for water supply and water management overdraws water from available resources. In Gujarat, for instance, when the monsoon failed, a 100-km long pipeline was laid by the Administration to supply water to Rajkot from Wankaner at a cost of about Rs.75 crore. It was decided that 45 m. liters of



water would be extracted daily from 125 borewell in the Jamboodia Reserve Forest in the Halbar-Wankaner area with the result that within 4 months the water table went down by 8 metres.⁷ Besides, deep tubewells of about 450-600 meters are dug within a radius of 10 km from Rajkot. Each day these borewells supply about 10-16.5 m. liter of water mainly transported with the help of tankers, doing a roaring business. The municipality also supplies 2.5-m. liters of water by tankers daily. In the Reassume block in Orissa, which was the worst affected by the cyclone, drinking water is not available even at depth of 1,500!

Another case of Gujarat where the government disbursed Rs.10,576.26 lakh as wages to people involved in relief works and automatically arranged for the dispatch of water-tankers. The Narmada-Mahi pipeline takes water to Ahmedabad and parts of Saurashtra. It was laid as part of a Rs.392 - crore master plan drawn by the Government to deal with drinking water scarcity which it conveniently believes is what causes droughts in the country!!

And to reiterate, a drought is not a natural calamity and nor can providential intervention (!) help in averting such tragedies. An illustration of such chicanery is the action of Bhairon Singh Shekawat, the only top politician to take concrete steps in the worst affected State of Rajasthan, facing drought for the 5th successive year. He spent lakhs to perform a 'maha-Yagna' at the Mahadeo Temple of Jaipur by inviting 150 pundits specifically from Jodhpur for the event! Amidst the chanting of 'slokas' a top BJP MP's wife poured milk on a shivling. Unfortunately, no rain fell on the parched land!

MYTH: The failure of rains or water scarcity is the main cause of droughts.

FACT: Not so! Water scarcity is the most visible attribute of drought. The correlation, however, between failure in seasonal rains resulting in drought is (again) highly simplistic! If water scarcity is an indicator of drought then Cherrapunji, having the highest rainfall, on earth, is also drought affected!

Natural or Man-made?

In reality, droughts are the result of decades of rape of nature, aggravated by total government neglect of agriculture. The lives of the peasants have been made so fragile that even a small disturbance is sufficient to shatter it. Besides, if the people were economically sound the impact of a drought would be limited due to the resilience in their ability to bare small ups and downs. But economic reforms have so devastated the countryside that a small drought or flood is sufficient to send them into ruination. It was earlier the World Bank policy that promoted 'green revolution'. The rabid use of fertilizers and pesticides, and ruthless extraction of ground water has laid waste vast tracts of farmland. Destruction of the topsoil, depletion of the nitrogenous matter in the soil and the continuous lowering of the water table is the outcome of decades of the World Bank's 'green revolution'. And if to this is added its other policy of the wide-scale clear-cutting of forests and replacing them with harmful monoculture of eucalyptus and teak has led to the beginning of an ecological disaster.

As the 'green revolution' destroys the earth, the forest policy destroys rainfall catchment areas. The faithful implementation of such WB policies has reduced the country into a state of permanent droughts, floods, etc. It is estimated that forest cover has reduced a massive 12% since 1947. As a result, the Planning Commission has estimated that each year 60,000 m. tonnes of fertile top-soil is washed away in the country. A ministry-working group has pegged the areas affected by water logging, alkalinity and salinity from 9 to 28%.⁵

Additionally, in the period of economic reforms expenditure on agriculture has been continuously reducing. The overall drop in investment in agriculture is shown by the fact that the share of agriculture in gross domestic capital formation has slid from 14.5% in 1980-81 to just 6.4% in 1998-99. Over the last two decades public investment in agriculture has virtually halved. It dropped from Rs.1,796 crores in 1980-81 (80/81 prices) to roughly Rs.900 crores (80/81 prices) in 1998/99. As a percentage of GDP in agriculture it fell from 4.2% in 1980-81 to 1.85% in 1996-97 and further to 1.45% in 1998-99. An example of this drop is the fall in the Agriculture Ministry's expenditure on foodgrain development of Rs.82 crores in 1990-91 to Rs.32 crores in 2000-2001. In 2000-2001, public investment in agriculture was down to Rs.4, 000 crores from about Rs.4,500 crores in 1993-94.

The result of such policies can be seen in all states, where those with power and pelf have resorted to tube-well irrigation. This naturally increased the inequalities in the rural areas with the well-off getting access to water and the poorer being deprived of it. In UP for instance it is estimated that 135 lakh hectares or 45% of the reported areas is degraded. Soil and water conservation expenditure its budget amounted to just Rs.344 crores (2000-01) on revenue account and nill on capital account. (In other words the full amount was for immediate works and nothing allocated for any long-term projects). This amounts to a mere Rs.115 per hectare, the bulk of which goes in establishment costs, to operate the scheme. Irrigation from canals is also on the decline; it dropped from 33 lakh hectares in 1984 to 31 lakh hectares in 1997. On the other hand tube-well irrigation has risen phenomenally amounting for 60% of the total irrigation.

Added to this overall decline in agriculture has been the massive hike in the basic necessities of life with the huge rise in prices of foodgrains and kerosene through the PDS. Since the last two to three years the PDS has all but collapsed leading to mass starvation on the one side and food mountains on the other. So, for example, even though drought struck a number of States, Rajasthan lifted 3.7% of rice and 26.5% of wheat allotted to it under PDS in 2000-01 against 28% and 84% in the previous year. Similarly, Gujarat lifted 29% of rice and 32% of wheat in 2000-01 compared to 73% and 91% four years earlier. Already between 1972/73 and 93/94 foodgrain consumption fell by 5% in urban areas and 12% in rural areas. In the last three years, due to the scrapped of the PDS scheme, it has fallen even further. It is such a situation that droughts become devastating. Hence, it is not a 'natural' calamity but a man-made crisis.

'Drought' an ambiguous term has been rather freely bandied about to explain away the problem of ever-increasing water scarcity or has been inevitably (and naively) related exclusively to deviations from normal in rainfall. Water scarcity and drought are no longer restricted to arid regions with scanty rainfall. Regions in non-arid zones, with good rains, are now more and more prone to drought. For instance the foothills of the Himalayas. Ironically, high rainfall receiving regions like Kerala and Goa are also demanding drought relief today. Neither is a unique phenomenon.

Drought occurs whenever and wherever the links (in nature's chain) the water cycle is interfered with and destabilized. The history of drought in India, especially since Independence, is a miserable chronicle of demolition, exacerbated by insensitive and irresponsible human interference.

Further, even if the argument that the monsoon has been erratic, the point is that when the average rainfall that preceded the current drought with the one prior to the devastating drought (for instance) of 1987, it will be noted that the present problem is far out of proportion with the deficit in the rainfall. In 1987, the rainfall was 30 per cent of the normal average, which in meteorological terms is considered a severe drought. This year the rainfall was 61 per cent of the normal average.

In short, the common refrain, "a drought is a result of poor monsoon" is a knee-jerk response of the Government. On the other hand, the Director General of the Meteorological Department maintains, "The drought in 2001 had nothing to do with a weak monsoon. We have had a normal monsoon for the 13th consecutive year". And, finally, it does not matter how much rain falls. If it is not harnessed there will still be shortage of water. It is unbelievable but true that Cherrapunji which gets 11,000 mm annual rain, still suffers from serious drinking water shortages!!

MYTH: Emergency relief measures are the only effective options in tackling these calamities.

FACT: 'Drought Relief' is not just a short-term measure but a mode also to disburse charity. And though it can and at times does reach scarcity prone areas, it seldom benefits those in desperate need of it viz., the poor. Consider the case of the Sahariya Adivasis of Baran district of Rajasthan where 50 of them died from starvation resulting from severe drought. Despite the availability of a number of central and state food aid schemes including a World Bank scheme, the impoverished community failed to get free food, subsidised grain, access to public health care or the food for work programme. This reality, however, is well understood by the poor. Hence, they dub 'drought relief' as 'teesra fasl' (the third crop!). Only they, the poor, are not the ones who harvest it! As is the practice, the responsibility of 'drought relief' is handed over to contractors who hire private parties delegated to lay

roads, dig wells, dispatch water tankers, build bridges, repair tanks, etc. The funds involved are enormous. Little wonder, drought relief is referred to as the country's biggest growth industry! The funds, in a single year, can make the withdrawals from Bihar's animal husbandry department pale in comparison. And it is all 'legal'. Above all, state governments all clamour for more and more 'drought relief' every time in such crises. For instance:

- ✖ Rajasthan has demanded emergency funds totaling a staggering Rs.60 billion;
- ✖ A.P. demands an additional Rs.3500 m.
- ✖ Chattisgarh demands Rs.900 m.
- ✖ Haryana has demanded Rs.120 m.
- ✖ Punjab demands Rs.8000 m. and an additional amount of Rs.4000 m. under the CRF, Rs.2000 for digging deep tubewells for supplying drinking water in the rural areas; Rs.1000 for drought reigning and micro management and Rs.500 m. each for green fodder, medicines for cattle and deep tubewells in the urban areas for providing drinking water
- ✖ Orissa Rs.5000 m. and
- ✖ Maharastra has demanded an additional amount of Rs.2050 m

But 'drought relief' rarely addresses the root causes of drought or water scarcity. Nor does relief translates into relief against drought. The funds for relief provide politicians and planners with a golden opportunity to extend their patronage and together with bureaucrats get their quota of the booty. For instance,

- ✖ In 1994-5 alone, Maharastra spent over Rs.1, 70 crores on emergency measures to fight drought. This was more than the combined profits in the previous year of the lending agencies across the country in the organized sector of the tea and coffee, cement, and car industries. Their profits, after tax, totaled Rs1,49 crores;
- ✖ In August 1995, the former P.M., Narasimha Rao, had launched an anti-drought project in Orissa involving an expenditure of Rs4, 557 crores in 6 years (over Rs.750 crores a year) on just a few districts.

MYTH: Emergency relief measures are immediately launched when a state is declared drought affected.

FACT: This claim has since proved to be merely hot air! Instead, all affected States are most preoccupied in presenting the Centre with a huge list for relief funds (as shown above). Considering the highly critical state that the country is in over the drought conditions it

would be expected that as a first step States would attempt to cut off their huge wasteful expenditures. Instead, they are not only more keen in laying their hands on the Rs.17 crores with the Centre, earmarked for relief but have also other wasteful priorities. For instance:

- ✱ Orissa has appointed 8 more ministers which will result in further expenditure of crores, but yet maintains that it has no funds for drought relief;
- ✱ A.P has been hiking its demands almost each fortnight! Its last demand was Rs.811 crore plus 15 lakh tonnes of foodgrain. Yet, Chief Minister Naidu has been preoccupied with sending 294 MLAs on an East Asia extravaganza (so-called study tour) to 5 countries, in batches of 50 each at a cost of Rs.12 crores;
- ✱ The Centre itself has also kept up its pressure on providing more sops to the IT industry. Even at the peak of the drought that swept through the drylands of the country in 1999-2000, the P.M. had announced Rs.11,000-crore worth of sops to this sector plus a series of tax concessions and tax holidays thereby conveying the impression that the solutions to human misery in the drought-affected regions are in Pentium technology!
- ✱ Karnataka has invested millions in the biotech industry as 'Top Priority.'

Most shocking however is that even as the drought situation deteriorated, the Government cut the subsidy

for the centrally sponsored scheme of the 'macro management of agriculture'. It also utilised the miserable plight of the peasantry to push through the World Bank proposal to restructure the cooperative banks. While it has dispersed a mere Rs.1, 200 crores for the drought affected, it has proposed an allocation of a massive Rs.8, 000 for restructuring the cooperative banks.

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Facts Against Myths is a monthly bulletin of factual information on a number of development myths and fallacies, etc, including information against alien development models, paradigms and false concepts on caste, creed and gender.



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