

## Letter to the Editor

### Latur water crisis: our eyes will open or not?

Sir,

Water is the most essential material for human survival, after air. Without water, life as we know it would not be possible. Yet, these days, clean drinking water is a scarce resource in many parts of the world, including India. Recently, I came across a video where a man was shown purchasing water for money, and with the passing time the amount to be spent continues increasing and amount of water he gets in return decrease. Eventually a time comes when the man offers all his money to the vendor, but could not get even a single drop in return due to increasing scarcity of water. It seems impertinent to some people at some places. It looks that such scarcity will never occur. But recent events in Maharashtra, Latur to be more specific are real eye opener. The situation in the Latur city is alarming to say the least. Everyday thousands of people queue up in front of public hydrants leading to fights. But for the imposition of Section 144 of the IPC preventing large gatherings, there could have been riots. Those, who can afford, have already left the city in search of greener pastures. The authorities concerned have been unable to provide drinking water in the promised quantities. As everywhere, it is the poor who are suffering the most. If the God does not answer people's prayers, a day will soon come when Latur will become a ghost city.<sup>1</sup> Habitants have also pointed at the presence of factories which excessively draw ground water. Wrong agricultural practices too have adversely affected the ground water resources. While the city has been growing exponentially, adequate attention has not been paid to its infrastructural needs. Latur is not an isolated case. There are many towns in the Marathwada region itself where the situation is only marginally better.<sup>1</sup> Other parts of country are not spared too. A severe drought has been sweeping the Bundelkhand region since 2003. It has let loose a severe livelihood crisis. Loss of agriculture is a major issue of concern. However, the issue of availability of drinking water has not got the emphasis it should have. Delhi, the national capital too, stares at water crisis, government asks residents to stock up. The crisis is expected to affect north Delhi, northwest Delhi, central Delhi and parts of west and south Delhi in summers.<sup>2</sup> Depleting water reserves is also a grave concern. Data from the ministry of water resources shown that, water levels in 91 major reservoirs in the country was at just 25% of capacity-30% lower than last year, and 25% less than the average storage in a decade. The situation is acute in the western parts of the country. Water stored in reservoirs in Maharashtra and Gujarat was at 21% of their capacity, compared to the usual decadal average of 44%. In

southern India, covering drought-hit states like Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, water levels were at 17% of reservoir capacity, compared to decadal average storage levels of 29% of capacity.<sup>3</sup> India's water crisis is predominantly a manmade problem. India's climate is not particularly dry, nor is it lacking in rivers and groundwater. Extremely poor management, unclear laws, government corruption, and industrial and human waste have caused this water supply crunch and rendered what water is available practically useless due to the huge quantity of pollution.<sup>4</sup> Now, as the slumber is looming large, it is high time, that all stake holders think upon it. Government, NGOs, Civil society groups and community itself will have to foresee the challenges and develop sustainable models of water harvesting/conservation. Sensitization of communities, affected or non-affected, on the issue, using all means of communication be it public or private, be it mass media or social media should be ensured, Methods of water conservation and development of appropriate models, suiting to local needs must be developed as soon as possible. We have many success stories within us as well.<sup>5</sup> Story of Rale gan siddhi is a well-known example.<sup>6</sup> Its high time we take lessons from our mistakes and let us act, before it leads to irreparable damage to our lives, our ecosystems. Let us open our eyes.

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