Sardar Sarovar and Gujarat's Water Crisis

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- The current water crisis in Gujarat has been exacerbated by irrational and wasteful water use policies.
\n
- The famous Sardar Sarovar Reservoir on Narmada has also come under severe water strain, along with its other troubles.
\n

\n\n

What is the water situation in Gujarat?

\n\n

\n
- **Drought Situation -** Gujarat is experiencing a severe water crisis and many dams and reservoirs across the state are also drying up.
\n
- Central Water Commission (CWC) Data shows that all 27 major reservoirs in Gujarat and Maharashtra have recorded lower water levels than last year.
\n
- Additionally, it has also been found to be less than the average storage of last 10 years during the corresponding months.
\n
- **Sardar Sarovar Dam -** This helps to irrigate 1.8 million hectares, and benefit 1 million farmers through a canal network that runs 75,000 km.
\n
- With the onset of summer, water level at the Dam has dipped below the minimum drawdown level of 110.64 m, which 25 meters less than in Sep 2017.
\n
- Stretches of the canal network are now lying parched, and Gujarat farmers have been denied access to Narmada waters for agricultural purposes.

- More strikingly, security personnel have been deployed along the main canals of the Dam to ensure that farmers do not illegally draw water.

What are the reasons for the current situation?

- **Deficient rainfall -** A substantial area of the Sardar Sarovar Dam's (SSD) and catchment area lies in Madhya Pradesh, which had a rainfall deficit.
- Rainfall shortages in these areas affect the SSD storage as well as most of Narmada's drainage edifice in downstream Gujarat.
- But Gujarat government has asserted that the allocation to the state is based on the total water availability in Narmada basin and not just the SSD.
- Hence, it has been vouched that storage across reservoirs in Madhya Pradesh can rescue Gujarat from dire water strain.
- **Irrational use -** Data show MP and Gujarat experienced deficit rainfall from August to November but no corrective water management plan was pushed.
- The state seems to have drawn much water during Kharif, when it should have saved it for Rabi crop and the expected harsh summer.
- Also, water for riverfront and other ceremonial occasions like the water flight could've been avoided as the monsoon failure was clear.
- Significantly, officials have denied water release to the Sabarmati River front from Sardar Sarovar Dam (SSD) as some MLAs had asserted.
- But water is released for Sabarmati River to cater to domestic, drinking water and industrial requirements of Ahmadabad city, through Vasna barrage.
- **Unwarranted releases -** The timing of the release of water by upstream dams on the Narmada in Madhya Pradesh has come under criticism.
- Notably, an unusual amount of water was released upstream of Sardar Sarovar (SSD) last September, prior to the inauguration of the SSD by PM Modi.

- Official records show that the high water level was achieved on the inauguration day due to an unexplained release by the MP government.
- This proved non-optimal and water levels in the reservoir increased till it reached its highest point in late-September, and then began to dip.

What are the other troubles with Sardar Sarovar Project?

- "Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal" provides for sharing electricity generated from SSD among MP (57%), Maharashtra (27%), and Gujarat (16%).
- But there has been no power generation form the unit since June 2017 and Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra haven't questioned this.
- While Gujarat government usually supplies water for irrigation till June, it has now been stated there will be no Narmada water for irrigation till Monsoon.
- The SSD authorities have also added that the government is not obligated to release water for the summer crop.
- There have also been some doubts raised on the structure of the dam as multiple seepages have been noted, which officials are said to be working on.

Source: Indian Express