



Date:23/06/2005 URL: <http://www.thehindu.com/2005/06/23/stories/2005062309820500.htm>

A case for defining water ownership

Special Correspondent

Parliament and State Assemblies should decide water rights of people before it is late: Waterman

JAIPUR: Waterman Rajendra Singh has asked the political leadership in the country to define the ownership of water so that possible bloodshed over the commodity, increasingly getting scarce, could be averted. "It is for Parliament and the State Assemblies to decide on the water rights of the people before it is too late," he said reacting to last week's police firing on farmers in Tonk district of Rajasthan.

"Such incidents cannot be ruled out in other parts of the country in future," Mr. Singh, who was here on his way to address a meeting of farmers in Diggi town, not far from Sohela where five persons were killed last week when police opened fire. "Access to drinking water is the fundamental right of the people. As far as irrigation water is concerned the right has to be decided," he said.

While condemning the police firing on Tonk farmers, Mr.Singh said the people in the vicinity of Bisalpur project had a right to the water in the dam.

Rightful claimants

"The natural law says that those who live in the vicinity of the source of water are its rightful claimants. That way people who are on the banks of the Banas river on which Bisalpur dam is located have a right for that water," he explained.

"Drinking water gets precedence over irrigation. However, at times looking at the wasteful use of water by people in urban centres like Jaipur one gets the feeling that they do not deserve it at all," Mr.Singh noted.

"These days Parliament and the Assemblies only discuss politics. It is time that the policy makers decide on the yet unsettled aspects of water rights like "whose water", priority areas for its use, the quantum for irrigation and similar factors," Mr.Singh said.

Asked about the complaint from the local people that after the construction of Bisalpur dam that the ground water level in the area had gone down, Mr.Singh said this could be true. "Unlike the johads (check dams) we make the big dams with cement and glass which stop percolation of water even down stream," he observed.