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'Decentralised water management vital'

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A PARADIGM shift in the technology used for water conservation is needed. The conventional practices like construction of check-dams have only led to inequitable distribution of water and this should be replaced by 'community driven decentralised water management' according to noted environmentalist and Magsaysay Award winner, Mr Rajendra Singh.

He is also against the proposal to link the rivers of the country at a colossal investment since the cost-benefit ratio was not economical, as it would cause strife among the people of different States.

While appreciating the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Ms J. Jayalalithaa's drive for Rain Water Harvesting (RWH), he advised the State to go for location-specific designs under this scheme as the nature of underground structures vary.

Interacting with the media during his visit to Coimbatore, Mr Rajendra Singh, Chairman, Tarun Bharat Sangh (TBS), Alwar, Rajasthan, said Tamil Nadu had different geo-hydrological formations and aquifers. Hence, only one design for RWH or engineering was not suitable for the entire State.

The Government's decision for RWH was good. He said rooftop harvesting of water alone was not sufficient. Every water source — be it small streams or nullahs — required different types of water conservation. Different strategies should be adopted to conserve the rainwater rather than simply impounding it. As the rainwater gushes

down, its speed should be checked, made to glide and then its absorption by the soil should be facilitated. This would help in recharging the groundwater.

Traditional practice of building check dams or anaicuts to impound water was 'not appropriate'. These were 'old designs'. Mr Singh said the centralised irrigation management system was passé and referred to the initiative taken by the Siruthuli Trust in Coimbatore to cleanse the water sources in Coimbatore as an example of the social initiative he was advocating. In Tamil Nadu, the average rainfall per year was not less than 700 mm whereas in Rajasthan it was a mere 200 mm and the community should be involved in water harvesting and in its disciplined use.

Asked about the plans to link rivers in the country, he said he was 'not in favour of the linkage of the river' and it was not a beneficial move.

The future of such a linkage was not known and it was both environmentally and ecologically not a beneficial step. Each river had a different character and gene pool and the linkage would disturb and pollute them.

There were issues such as cultural bonding and the colossal cost involved which had made such river linkage not feasible.