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Investigation - Mahadayi

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Mahadayi: State govt. gearing up to counter Goa's allegations

Diversion of the Mahadayi waters is nearly impossible, say officials

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Irrigation Department officials in Karnataka are gearing up to counter Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's claim that the State is diverting the Mahadayi waters in a way that it can change the river's course. Goa has filed a contempt petition in this regard in the Supreme Court.

Mr. Sawant had alleged at a press meet in Panaji earlier this week that Karnataka was diverting the Mahadayi waters. He also alleged that Karnataka had begun work on the Kalasa-Banduri Nala projects without due permits and clearances from the Central government. Subsequently, the neighbouring State filed a contempt petition against Karnataka.

Karnataka Irrigation Department engineers told *The Hindu* that they were yet to get a clear idea about what is in the petition since there was no official communication.

"But based on Goa Chief Minister's press conference, we can infer that they are alleging that we have diverted the Mahadayi waters in violation of rules. That is not true," said Mallikarjun Gunge, managing director of the Karnataka Neeravari Nigam Ltd., the special purpose vehicle tasked with the Mahadayi project.



A file photo of the Mahadayi flowing in Khanapur taluk of Belagavi district.

"There has been no diversion of any kind. They have also alleged that we have begun work in the Mahadayi river basin without obtaining due permits from Central agencies. That is also far from truth. We have applied to all jurisdictional agencies and we are waiting for permissions," he said.

"When the Mahadayi tribunal, a Supreme Court-appointed body, gave its award allocating separable share of water to the riparian States, both Karnataka and Goa opposed it. We have both ap-

proached the Supreme Court against the award and that is pending there. We will take our next steps once that is settled," he added.

Diversion of the Mahadayi waters is "nearly impossible" because the barrier built between the nalas and the river is an underground concrete wall that is six metres wide. "It cannot be opened or removed easily. We have not even contemplated that," he said.

Karnataka's legal team in New Delhi is also waiting to hear about the petition. "We

are yet to get a copy of the petition, if it has been filed," said Mohan Kataraki, senior advocate in the Supreme Court who is part of Karnataka's legal team. According to him, Karnataka had ably answered all the issues raised in Goa's contempt in 2018. "It was not very significant and did not have much impact. Similarly, we don't believe the current petition will have much of an impact," he said.

Major and Medium Irrigation Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi said his department had not taken any illegal steps. "We are taking all necessary legal steps to get approvals before starting work," the Minister said.

Site visit

Meanwhile, Goa-based environmentalist Rajendra Kerkar told *The Hindu*, "We requested Goa to file the contempt petition as Karnataka has gone ahead with the diversion despite the assurances given by senior counsel Fali Nariman. Goa government engineers have visited the work sites and collected documents and pictures of the diversion work. This is being presented before the Supreme Court." He claimed that it was not a sustainable project and would cause great harm to the Western Ghats.