

Bihar eyes irrigation potential on 779,000 hectares, says minister

Jha informs that the rubber dam project on the Fagu river is heading towards completion

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PATNA: Bihar government is working to create irrigation potential in 779,000 hectares of area under its ambitious "water to every farm" scheme, a key component of chief minister Nitish Kumar's "Seven Resolves (Part-2)" in the present regime, state's water resources minister Sanjay Kumar Jha said in the Assembly on Wednesday.

Giving the government's reply on the budgetary demand of ₹4,692.98 crore after two-hour debate, Jha said the state-wide technical survey had been completed between January 18-July 29, 2021 and schemes identified for augmenting irrigation potential and ensuring water to every farm in the next four years. The budget was passed with voice vote after Opposition walked out at the tag end.

"The CM has been keen on rejuvenating lost water bodies and ensuring optimal use of surplus water in rivers during floods by diverting them to parched areas as part of the water to every farm initiative. It involves restoring the traditional 'ahaar-paen', interlinking of rivers, construction of reservoirs and pipelines and a lot more. Work has already commenced on several projects and schemes. Budgetary provision for schemes has already been made in the 2022-23 budget," he said, adding the target



Sanjay Kumar Jha

is to create additional irrigation potential of 143,163 hectares in 2022-23 and restore lost irrigation potential on 211,000 hectares.

The minister said his department was working on rejuvenation of dried-up rivers and intra-linking of small rivers, a new concept given by Bihar in place of inter-linking of rivers, which will not only help in flood mitigation, but also create irrigation potential. "It was due to Bihar's efforts that the National Water Development Authority (NWDA) has now been entrusted to work on intra-linking of rivers also. Bihar's Bagmati-Ganga link, Budhi Gandak Noon via Ganga link and Bagmati-Budhi Gandak link schemes are under the consideration of the central agency," he said.

The minister said that that at present the state government is working with its own resources on intra-linking of small rivers of Bagmati, Kamla and Kosi Basin in north Bihar and Punpun, Keul-Harohar basin and smaller rivers in south Bihar. "Belwa Dhar scheme in Sitamarhi involving transfer of surplus Bagmati water to Budhi Gandak has already shown a lot of potential. It is the first state intra-linking project and set to be completed this year. The Kosi-Mechi river link project is also moving forward after getting all clearances from the Centre. It has been

included in the national project, which will ensure 60% funding from the Centre. However, we want it to be Centre-State sharing on 90:10 basis and we have written in this regard, citing Ken-Betwa project. The project cost was estimated at ₹4,900 crore in 2016 and would go further up. It will be a game changer for four Seemanchal districts of Purnia, Katihar, Kishanganj and Araria," he said.

Jha said that the rubber dam project on the Fagu river, inaugurated by the CM on September 22, 2020, is heading towards completion and once completed, it would ensure round-the-year water availability near the famous Vishnupad temple, which draws lakhs of devotees every year. "The government wants to complete it before Pitripaksh Mela and it should be achieved by August 2022, though the scheduled deadline was October 2023. The 'Ganga Jal Apoori Yojana' under the ambitious 'Jal-Jeevan-Hadtyali' initiative for environmental protection is set to be completed by June this year despite its extension to include Nawada with Gaya, Bodh Gaya and Rajgir," he said.

Listing other major initiatives, Jha said the western Kosi canal project would create additional irrigation potential of 265,000 hectares in Darbhanga and Madhubani and it is being expanded. "The work on the ₹405-crore barrage in Jaynagar has also started and is likely to be completed next year. The work on the strengthening of left and right embankment of Kamla Balan is also on. It will save a large area of Mithila from the scourge of flood and create irrigation potential," he said.

Left red-faced over its MGNREGA reply, govt orders probe

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PATNA: The Bihar government on Wednesday ordered an inquiry after it was left red-faced over a reply on job creation under MGNREGA it shared in the state assembly after leader of the opposition Tejashwi Prasad Yadav trashed the figures as "misleading" and contrary to the data in the national portal of the centrally sponsored rural employment scheme.

"We will enquire into the matter and take action against officials if they are found to have given wrong answers for government reply on jobs created under MGNREGA in the current fiscal," said rural development minister Shravan Kumar.

The minister's assurance came after Tejashwi challenged his reply that the government

had provided jobs to 61 lakh out of 62 lakh applicants under the scheme in this current fiscal.

"The government is claiming it has provided work to 99.91% of job applicants. This is completely wrong. The national portal of MGNREGA, which updates data on real-time basis, shows a different story," Tejashwi said, displaying data sheets uploaded from the portal.

The RJD leader said the national portal showed that 1.53 crore job cardholders had sought work in the year 2021-22, whereas state government is claiming that only 62 lakh people had sought work.

"As per the portal, only 45.67 lakh people have got work under the scheme while only 14,590 job cardholders have got 100 days of work this year. The average work allotted per household is 36.65 mandays," he said.



RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav interacts with media outside Bihar assembly on Wednesday.

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