

Indian Express 22.12.2009

Miles to go before 24x7 water supply

Mumbai's dream of 24-hour water supply through the Sujal Mumbai plan will have to wait. The skewed demand-supply gap with a continuous rise in population indicates intermittent supply through the year.

Sujal Mumbai, announced in 2007, involves measures like telescopic rates (additional payment if more than 150 litres is used). A pilot project on automatic meters has been introduced; it is to be completed in 2012.

"24x7 supply is not feasible in the near future as it requires universal metering and identifying leaks through a water audit," said Madhav Chitale, former irrigation secretary who was appointed in 1993 for long-term planning for augmenting water supply.

The measures for metering and addressing the leakages have not been introduced. These include measures for water distribution management and non-revenue water reduction, digital mapping of utilities on GIS maps, 100 per cent bulk consumer metering, district metering of 1000 connections, leakage detection, and replacement of old Tansa and Vaitarna pipelines. The Centre has already rejected funding under JNNURM for the change of pipelines

Estimates put the leakages due to illegal connections and thefts at 700 mld; officials say these are only guesses. "There is no error-proof mechanism to identify underground leakage. We need to carry out a detailed water audit and fix leakages. Till then, 24-hour supply is impossible," Chitale said. The civic administration wants the World Bank's help to identify a private party for the audit; that plan has remained on paper. Officials stressed detailed area management of water, with locality-wise consumption details. "This is only possible through metering. If one area is getting more water, it can be diverted to another low-pressure area," said an official.

A white paper on the present and future water situation, presented early this year, estimated that till 2021 Mumbai will not be able to meet its demand.

The committee had recommended that the Middle Vaitarna and Gargai, Pinjal projects be given priority. The Middle Vaitarna project will add 450 mld to the 3,450 mld being supplied; Gargai and Pinjal will add 455 mld and 865 mld. Chitale stressed a sliding scale for water. "The rate across the city is uniform. To lift water from source and supply to a faroff place like Colaba is more expensive than supplying maybe to Bhandup."

25% cut

The city will face an additional 10 per cent water cut from tomorrow till 11 am Saturday, taking the total cut to 25 per cent. This is because of work on joining pipelines with the new Tansa main line. The water department will also fix leakages on the Tansa East pipeline on

Tuesday. The cut will be restored to 15 per cent after the work is done.