

মমতা বানার্জী
মমতা বৈনর্জী
ممتا بنرجی

Mamata Banerjee

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মুখ্যমন্ত্রী, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ
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CHIEF MINISTER, WEST BENGAL

November **17**, 2022

Respected Prime Minister,

Kindly recall my letter dated February 21, 2022 (copy enclosed) wherein I had highlighted, among other things, the grave threat of erosion posed by the Ganga-Padma river system in the district of Malda, Murshidabad and Nadia and requested you once again to restore the extended jurisdiction of the Farakka Barrage Project (FBP).

The Union Minister for Jal Shakti, Government of India vide his letter dated July 28, 2022 has given a reply on the issues raised in my letter. I have studied it in detail and would like to place before you the following fact, some even at the cost of repetition, for your kind consideration and favourable action.

You are kindly aware that West Bengal is an extensively river-oriented State with the Ganga being a vital river in the State. It is true that the main objective of the construction of Farakka Barrage under the Central Government is to divert 40,000 Cusec of Ganga water to the Bhagirathi-Hooghly river system, so that the navigability of Kolkata Port is maintained. However, this has led to siltation on the river bed, particularly upstream of the barrage, resulting in spilling, bank erosion in both upstream and downstream, and flooding in the adjacent areas. This issue has been raised at national level, not only by West Bengal but also by Bihar. In fact, the extent of erosion is so severe that the distance between the two banks of the rivers – the Ganga and the Fulhar, has come down to only 1.5 KM at Billaimari village of Manikchak block in Malda district, from its earlier distance of 4.0 KM recorded in 2004, thus posing serious threats to people of the adjoining villages and even to the safety of the National Highway 131A – an important road connectivity route in the area connecting North Bengal to South Bengal..

The Union Minister, in his letter, has further indicated that FBP has executed anti-erosion/river protection work to the tune of Rs.342 Crore during the period from 2005 to 2019. However, it is noticed that the area is still suffering from severe erosion problems at several sites, including repeated erosion at the same site. As a result, it is clear that anti-erosion efforts have been attempted piecemeal, with no holistic approach taken. There is, in fact, a need to take up permanent restoration works instead of such palliative

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activities. I would, therefore, request you to kindly advise the concerned Department to conduct a joint study supported by suitable model analysis, involving the Farakka Barrage Project Authority and the governments of West Bengal and Bihar, under the aegis of the Ganga Flood Control Commission. This will help find a sustainable solution for the abatement of erosion and flooding in the upstream and downstream of the barrage. Such a study will also indicate required changes in the barrage gate regulation during the monsoon season, which needs to be done as soon as possible, given the severe erosion on both banks of the river immediately downstream of the barrage, which has endangered the historical town of Dhulian and Samserganj Block in Murshidabad district.

We also feel that it may not be appropriate for the Farakka Barrage Project Authority to confine their anti-erosion works to a stretch of about five times of the barrage length downstream (12.5 KM in the upstream and 6.9 KM in the downstream of Farakka Barrage). In this regard, I would like to point out that for the proposed barrage construction by Bangladesh across the river Ganga within their territory at about 80 KM downstream of the India-Bangladesh border, anticipated erosion at the aforesaid entire stretch from Farakka Barrage to the proposed new Barrage has been proposed for adequate examination by the India-Bangladesh Joint Technical Committee. Both the existing and proposed barrages are on the river Ganga and have almost similar river morphology. Hence, it may not be out of place to mention that the existing jurisdiction of anti-erosion works of the Farakka Barrage Project Authority needs serious re-examination at the earliest. Moreover, even in their original jurisdiction, the Farakka Barrage Project Authority has not taken up any comprehensive anti-erosion activity, but has executed piecemeal work only to show off.

On the issue of Central assistance under Flood Management Plan as mentioned by the Union Minister, it is worth mentioning here that no such assistance under FMP was provided by the Central Government during the XI and XII Plan periods to address river erosion in Ganga-Padma, either to the Farakka Barrage Project Authority or to the State Government, though such demands were repeatedly raised by the State Government during the period from 2015 to 2022. Even during the period of extended jurisdiction, which remained valid from January 2005 to July 2017, the Farakka Barrage Project Authority failed to plan and implement required anti-erosion works on the

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extended stretch of 120 KM, though the State Government had repeatedly urged the Central Government to direct FBP to do so.

I would like to further state that in the absence of any defined guidelines, strategy and funding pattern under the Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP) from 2013 to February 2022, there was hardly any scope for us to include any new flood management projects under this programme, like the Ganga-Padma Erosion Protection Work. Nonetheless, we have undertaken some urgent bank protection works on our own at 31 identified vulnerable stretches (at a cost of more than Rs.168 crore) between 2017 and 2021. I have already mentioned this in my earlier letter written to you on February 21, 2022. Our government has taken up erosion-abatement works for a length of 14 KM at a total cost of more than Rs.80 Crore during the last one year as well. But, as you may kindly appreciate, given the magnitude of erosion along Ganga-Padma, such works are unlikely to provide any long-term sustainable solution to this grave problem.

In the context of what has been said above, I would, therefore, urgently request you to advise the concerned Ministry to arrange for a detailed technical study involving all stakeholders, like the governments of West Bengal and Bihar, and the Ganga Flood Control Commission and FBPA. The findings of the study may then be utilized to formulate an integrated plan to combat erosion in this zone, which is now the need of the hour. Since the interventions required will have high-cost implications, I also urge you to ensure that suitable budgetary provisions are made for the same as part of central assistance under FMBAP, so that the life and property of people in the area are saved.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,


(Mamata Banerjee)

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