

Committee to draft new water policy



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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The Union **Water** Resources Ministry has finalised a committee to draft a new National Water Policy (NWP). It will be chaired by Mihir Shah, who is a former Planning Commission member and a water expert. The committee has 10 principal members, including Shashi Shekhar, a former secretary of Water Resources, and A.B. Pandya, former chairman of the Central Ground Water Board.

The committee is expected to produce a report within six months.

In September, Union Water Resources Minister Gajendra Shekhawat said that the Centre was planning to update the NWP and make key changes in water governance structure and regulatory framework. A National Bureau of Water Use Efficiency was also on the cards, he said.

The NWP currently in force was drafted in 2012 and is the third such policy since 1987. Among the major policy innovations in the 2012 policy was the concept of an Integrated Water Resources Management approach that took the “river basin/ sub-basin” as a unit for planning, development and management of water resources.

Minimum levels

It also proposed that a portion of river flows ought to be kept aside to meet ecological needs. Such an approach led to the government, in 2018, requiring minimum water levels to be maintained in the Ganga all through the year and hydropower projects, therefore, to refrain from hoarding water beyond a point. That policy also stressed for a minimum quantity of potable water for essential health and hygiene to all its citizens to be made available within easy reach of households.

“Inter-basin transfers are not merely for increasing production but also for meeting basic human need and achieving equity and social justice. Inter-basin transfers of water should be considered on the basis of merits of each case after evaluating the environmental, economic and social impacts of such transfers,” the policy noted.