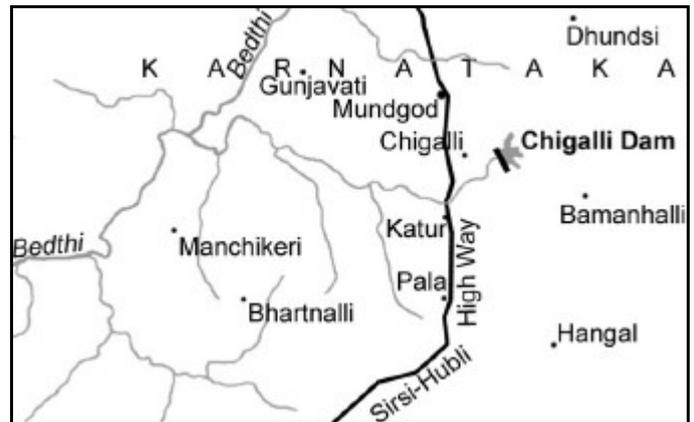


## Chigalli dam breach in Karnataka

The ill maintained 21 m high Chigalli dam in Mundgod taluk in Uttar Kannad district near Hubli city of Karnataka breached in the evening of August 14. The 25 m long breach in the 29 year old dam damaged 500 acres of paddy cultivation. More than 10 heads of cattle have been washed away in the flood. As the reservoir was full at the time when the dam wall gave way, over 8 million cubic meters of water is expected to have suddenly been released from the dam. The highway between Hubli and Sirsi, about 3 km downstream from the dam was damaged and the traffic was blocked as the water flowed over the road. Chigalli reservoir irrigated 1 200 ha land in Chigalli, Mundasali, Hirehalli, Allali, Kavalkoppa, Salgaon villages. Sources say that a minor crack had already appeared in the dam. The channel through which access water should flow was also not working properly. In April 2006, a gate of the dam was stolen and another was damaged. (The Deccan Herald 160807, The Hindu 090406, 70807)

### Salient Features

River	Bedthi (west flowing river)
Taluk	Mundgod
District	Uttar Kannad
State	Karnataka
Nearest City	Hubli
Year of Commissioning	1978
Type	Earthen
Purpose	Irrigation
Height	20.74 m
Length	910 m
Reservoir area	180 hectares
Live storage	8.21 mcm
Gross storage	8.85 mcm



**No questions raised about accountability** While the concerned minister promised that those that have been affected by the breach in the 180 ha reservoir, no questions seem to be asked about the responsibility for the breach in the dam. This is typical of India's water resources establishment, there is no talk of accountability anywhere. Three more reservoirs in the district were reported to be in damaged condition and the deputy commissioner has instructed officials to inspect all the reservoirs and conduct a survey of the agriculture lands on the lower parts of the reservoirs in the district.

**Third Dam Breach in 2007 monsoon** This is the third dam that has breached this monsoon and this one in Bedthi river basin was only 29 years old. As in the case of breach of Jaswant Sagar Dam in Rajasthan and Chandora dam in Madhya Pradesh earlier this monsoon, this raises, many questions about the dam safety procedures, about repair and maintenance of India's irrigation infrastructure. This was a large dam according to the definition of the International Commission on Large Dams, and yet the Minor irrigation department was responsible for the dam.

**No money for maintenance** Indian water resources establishment refuses to allocate resources for the huge irrigation infrastructure created in the country over the last sixty years. This irrigation infrastructure, according to Sandra Postel, is the largest in the world. According to the World Bank's India Water Sector report of 2005 titled *India's Water Economy: Bracing for a Turbulent Future* said that annual requirement for repair and maintenance of India's water infrastructure was over USD 4 billion, that is over Rs 17 000 crores. But not even a small fraction of that amount has been allocated. The deeply entrenched pro large dam lobby within the water resources establishment is happy putting all available money into more *lucrative* option of building new dams. The working group on water for the 11<sup>th</sup> five year plan, chaired by the secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, has recommended that at least 15% of the investment should be put aside for the Irrigation Maintenance Fund, but it is doubtful if the pro big dam lobby will allow that.

Wake up calls do not come too many times and the third wake up call this monsoon should make all concerned wide awake. How many will we need?