Cauvery: Supreme Court dismisses Tamil Nadu's pleas for water (20 Nov)

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News

A Supreme Court bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Aparesh Kumar Singh on Friday, 20 November 2026 dismissed two interlocutory applications filed by the Tamil Nadu government seeking a direction to Karnataka to release about 11 TMC of Cauvery water (Tamil Nadu claimed a shortfall of 11.719 TMC at Biligundlu up to 6 October); 'We have dismissed (the application)', the bench said. Justice Vikram Nath also said orally that a third application Tamil Nadu filed that day would meet the same fate. Tamil Nadu had moved the Court on 3 August, saying it had not received its share in this rain-deficient year and that farmers and crops were suffering. It also said Karnataka had not implemented the Cauvery Water Management Authority's (CWMA) 30 July direction (54th emergency meeting, endorsing the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee's (CWRC) 28 July decision at its 139th meeting) to ensure 3,500 cusecs at Biligundlu for 15 days from 29 July, from the Kabini and Krishna Raja Sagar reservoirs. On 17 August the Court directed Karnataka to comply with CWMA orders; on 24 August Tamil Nadu said it had received the directed water but not make-up water for the earlier deficit. Karnataka denied this, saying it was complying with CWMA directions. Detailed reasons for the dismissal are not yet available (order text awaited). (On 22 September the Court had also refused to entertain a separate plea by a society seeking transfer of about 70 TMC from Tamil Nadu's share to Karnataka.)

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Date	20 November 2026 (Friday)
Bench	Justices Vikram Nath, Aparesh Kumar Singh
Pleas	2 interlocutory applications of TN govt
Sought	Order for Karnataka to release about 11 TMC
TN moved Court	3 August 2026
CWMA order	30 July – 3,500 cusecs at Biligundlu for 15 days (Kabini, KRS)
Karnataka's stand	Says it complies with CWMA
Related	22 Sept – society's 70 TMC plea also not entertained
Third application	Filed the same day; bench said orally it would meet the same fate

Background

- History: the Cauvery dispute is rooted in the 1892 and 1924 agreements between the Madras Presidency and the princely State of Mysore. The Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, set up in 1990, gave its final award in 2007. Both States appealed; in 2023 the Supreme Court declined to raise Tamil Nadu's release from 5,000 to 7,200 cusecs (Bar & Bench).
- 2018 verdict: on 16.02.2018 a bench of CJI Dipak Misra and Justices Amitava Roy and A.M. Khanwilkar cut Tamil Nadu's tribunal share of 192 TMC to 177.25 TMC, to be released by Karnataka at the Biligundlu border; Karnataka gained 14.75 TMC. It held that the water of an inter-State river is a 'national asset'. It directed the Centre to frame a scheme under Section 6A of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956; the modified allocation is to hold for 15 years (Supreme Court judgment, 16.02.2018).
- Bodies: under that scheme the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) and the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC), which monitors day-to-day releases, were set up. How to share water in rain-deficient 'distress years' remains the recurring dispute.
- Geography: the Cauvery rises at Talakaveri in the Brahmagiri hills of Kodagu district, Karnataka, and flows through Karnataka and Tamil Nadu into the Bay of Bengal. Keralam and the Union Territory of Puducherry are also part of the basin. The Kabini, Hemavathi, Bhavani and Amaravathi are among its tributaries.

Tamil Nadu link: Kuruvai and samba paddy in the Cauvery delta districts depend on Karnataka's releases and Mettur dam. Besides the Cauvery, a Tamil Nadu–Karnataka dispute over the Pennaiyar (Then Pennai) is also pending in the Supreme Court (Bar & Bench).

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

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to Karnataka to release about 11 TMC of Cauvery water (Tamil Nadu claimed a shortfall of 11.719 TMC at Biligundlu up to 6 October); 'We have dismissed (the application)', the bench said.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Date: 20 November 2026 (Friday); Bench: Justices Vikram Nath, Aparesh Kumar Singh; Pleas: 2 interlocutory applications of TN govt; Sought: Order for Karnataka to release about 11 TMC.

What is the background to this news?

History: the Cauvery dispute is rooted in the 1892 and 1924 agreements between the Madras Presidency and the princely State of Mysore.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. The 2018 scheme that set up the Cauvery Water Management Authority was framed under which section of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956?

A) Section 3

B) Section 4

C) Section 6A

D) Section 11

Answer: C – Explanation: Section 6A lets the Centre frame a scheme to implement a tribunal award. Section 4 – setting up a tribunal; Section 11 – bar on courts.

2. Talakaveri, the source of the Cauvery, is in which district of Karnataka?

A) Kodagu

B) Hassan

C) Chikkamagaluru

D) Mysuru

Answer: A – Explanation: Kodagu (Coorg) – in the Brahmagiri hills of the Western Ghats. The Cauvery flows through Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to the Bay of Bengal.

3. Besides the Cauvery, another Tamil Nadu–Karnataka river dispute pending in the Supreme Court concerns which river?

A) Vaigai

B) Then Pennai (Pennaiyar)

C) Thamirabarani

D) Periyar

Answer: B – Explanation: The Then Pennai rises in Karnataka and flows via Krishnagiri and Tiruvannamalai to the sea near Cuddalore. The Periyar dispute is with Keralam.

4. Who headed the Supreme Court bench that cut Tamil Nadu's Cauvery share in its verdict of 16.02.2018?

A) J.S. Khehar

B) Ranjan Gogoi

C) T.S. Thakur

D) Dipak Misra

Answer: D – Explanation: CJI Dipak Misra (with Amitava Roy and A.M. Khanwilkar). It held that inter-State river water is a 'national asset'.

5. Cauvery water released by Karnataka to Tamil Nadu is measured at which inter-State border point?

A) Biligundlu

B) Mettur

C) Krishna Raja Sagar

D) Srirangapatna

Answer: A – Explanation: Biligundlu – the border gauging point upstream of Mettur. Under the 2018 verdict, 177.25 TMC a year must reach here.

Sources: LiveLaw / DT Next / ANI, 20 Nov 2026; News On AIR, 3 Aug 2026 (TN moves SC); The Pioneer (PTI), 22 Sep 2026; Supreme Court judgment, State of Karnataka v. State of Tamil Nadu, 16 Feb 2018 (sci.gov.in); Bar & Bench (2023 order). © Shanmugam IAS Academy.