‘Cooperation can resolve Mahanadi dispute’
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With the dispute over Mahanadi river water sharing between Odisha and Chhattisgarh reaching a flashpoint, experts and civil society groups have urged the two governments to discuss all the contentious issues for a meaningful solution.

At the second Odisha river conference, which concluded on Monday, experts said competitive politics over the Mahanadi water sharing was only making the matter complicated.

A group of civil society organisations, river and water experts and academics from across the country and the two States gathered here to build an Inter-State Cooperation Framework for the resolution of the Mahanadi river water dispute.

Politics over conflicts

“There have been a lot of politics and inter-State river water conflicts in the country. But in the process of fighting, let the rights of the river as an ecological entity not get snatched. While the dispute between Odisha and Chhattisgarh is rife, it is unfortunate that both the States are treating the Mahanadi as a commodity and not a natural resource,” said Ranjan Panda, the convenor of Water Initiatives Odisha.

“No doubt Chhattisgarh has constructed many dams and barrages without the consent of Odisha and has obstructed a lot of water, but that does not mean we can conclude that Chhattisgarh has siphoned off water from Odisha’s share,” said Mr. Panda.

“We need a comprehensive understanding and analysis of the impacts of all these structures and availability of water in the basin. Let the tribunal decide how to make such an analysis and instruct Chhattisgarh to stop these obstructions if they are illegal,” Mr. Panda said, urging the two States not to close the door on dialogue.

Internationally renowned climate change expert Saroj Dash hoped good sense would prevail and the two States would climb down from their stand and make space for dialogue. “The premise for the discussion should be cooperation, not conflict,” Mr. Dash said.

“We don’t need either Odisha-centric or Chhattisgarh-centric approach. People’s rights on the river should be the guiding principle for dialogue,” said Premananda Panda, an academic.

Mahanadi, the sixth largest river in India, originates from Chhattisgarh and enters the Bay of Bengal travelling 851 km, of which 357 km lies in Chhattisgarh and 494 km in Odisha. Odisha has been grumbling that the Mahanadi is witnessing an 80% reduction of water flow in non-monsoon months while Chhattisgarh says it is only storing river water.