Kaleshwaram project

Why in news?

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) wants a relook at Kaleshwaram project.

What is the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project?

- The Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation System is considered to be one of the world's largest multi-purpose projects.
- It is designed to provide water for irrigation and drinking purposes to about 45 lakh acres in 20 of the 31 districts in Telangana.
- It will supply drinking water to several towns and villages and also to twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad.
- It will provide water for Hyderabad and Secunderabad.
- The cost of the project is Rs 80,000 crore, but is expected to rise to Rs 1 lakh crore by the time it is completely constructed.

What does the project entail?

- The project is unique as Telangana will harness water at the confluence of two rivers with Godavari by constructing a barrage at Medigadda.
- The water will be reverse pumped into the main Godavari River.
- From here, it will be diverted through lifts and pumps into a huge and complex system of reservoirs, water tunnels, pipelines and canals.
- The project has set many records with the world's longest water tunnels, aqueducts, underground surge pools, and biggest pumps.
- The total length of the entire project is approximately 1,832 km.
- Of this, 1,531 km is gravity canals and 203 km comprise water tunnels.
- It involves digging of 20 reservoirs with total capacity to store 145 TMC.
- Except for a few stretches involving pipelines and canals, much of the project is complete.

How important is KLIS to Telangana?

- Kaleshwaram will transform Telangana into an agricultural powerhouse.
- It will enable Telangana farmers to reap multiple crops with a year-round supply of water.
- Mission Bhagiratha is a project to supply drinking water to every household in villages.

- This mission draws a large quantity of water from the KLIS and some quantity from projects on River Krishna.

What is the recent order of the NGT?

- The Principal Bench of the National Green Tribunal, New Delhi, ruled that the Environmental Clearance given to the project in 2017 was void.
- It ruled so, saying that the Telangana government changed the design of the project to increase its capacity to pump from 2 TMC to 3 TMC water.
- The NGT observed that major changes were made in the project, due to which large tracts of forest land and other land was taken over.
- Massive infrastructure was built causing adverse environmental impact.

What was Telangana government's argument?

- It argued that the expansion of the project to extract 3 TMC did not involve any infrastructural changes and so a fresh EC was not required.
- This argument was not accepted by the NGT.

What was the NGT response?

- The NGT said that extraction of more water requires more storage capacity, and affects hydrology and riverine ecology of Godavari River.
- Such issues may have to be examined by the statutory authorities concerned.
- The NGT said that it is difficult to accept the plea that enhancement of capacity by one third will not require any infrastructural changes.
- It ordered that, in any case, this aspect needs to be evaluated by the statutory expert Committees before the expansion is undertaken.

What should the MoEFCC do?

- The NGT directed the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to constitute an Expert Committee.
- This Committee would assess the extent of damage caused in going ahead with the project's expansion and to identify restoration measures.
- The Expert Committee will complete its exercise within six months.

What should the Telangana Government do?

- The NGT directed the Telangana Government to stop all work except the drinking water component.
- It wants the government to obtain a Forest Clearance from the Centre before going ahead with the project.

What has been the Telangana government's response?

- Irrigation Secretary said the state government will abide by the NGT directions and obtain the necessary clearances.
- According to Irrigation Department engineers, to enhance the capacity from 2 TMC to 3 TMC not very big changes are required.
- To store the additional 1 TMC, land for a reservoir has already been acquired while pipelines and canals are already in the works.

Source: The Indian Express

