Ken Betwa link project (KBLP)

Why in news?

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- Of the three gatekeepers in the Environment Ministry, the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) and the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) recommended the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP) for clearance in 2016.
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- Now with a favourable report tabled at a meeting of the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) last week, the stage is set for statutory green nods for the project.
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What is the recent issue?

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- And yet, the validity of such clearances, if issued at this stage, may not stand legal scrutiny.
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- That is because the recommendations of the NBWL and the EAC, in fact, call for a fresh project report, which, in turn, will require a fresh assessment of its potential impact.
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- On August 23, 2016, the NBWL cleared the KBLP following an assurance that “all the power generating facilities **shall be established outside the TR (Panna Tiger Reserve)** and the operations shall have minimal disturbance on the TR (tiger reserve)”.
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- Since the present KBLP layout has the power station inside the tiger reserve, this requires chalking up a fresh project plan and getting its potential impact assessed for environmental concerns.
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- Any clearance issued before this process is complete may not be legally tenable.
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- The Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court is already looking into the wildlife clearance recommended for the KBLP.
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What are the concerns raised by Forest Appraisal Committee?

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- FAC recommended that the project canal should be realigned to minimise the use of forest land.
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- It also concluded that the Benefit/Cost (BC) ratio did not pay “attention to eco system services lost due to diversion of unique riverine eco system”.
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- It recommended “a detailed study and fresh analyses by reputed institutions to take future action and modification if required”.
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- The 8-member committee’s report tabled at the FAC meeting last week acknowledged “the fact there isn’t enough water in the Ken basin to warrant a dam of this height and that there is no point in clearing of the forest area”.
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What are the concerns about KBLP?

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- While the KBLP is being aggressively pushed as a **solution for parched Bundelkhand,** the project is meant to actually divert water from the area.
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- According to the National Water Development Agency (NWDA), the KBLP “envisages diversion of surplus waters of Ken basin to water deficit Betwa basin”.
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- In the upper reaches of the basin, the NWDA went on to elaborate, “an area of 1.27 lakh ha [hectares] in the Raisen and Vidisha districts of Madhya Pradesh will be benefitted by utilising water annually from this link by way of substitution.”
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- Along the way to Raisen and Vidisha, the link will also provide for Bundelkhand, but only small lands to be to irrigated according to the NWDA, in “the districts of Tikamgarh and Chhatarpur of MP and Mahoba and Jhansi

of Uttar Pradesh”.
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- Thus the promise of irrigating the Bundelkhand region by this KBLP is a false notion.
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Source: Indian Express

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