Mahanadi River Water Dispute

Prelims: *Current events of national and international importance*

Why in News?

Recently, the Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal (MWDT) has given Odisha and Chhattisgarh a final opportunity to reach an amicable settlement.

- **River Mahanadi –** It is the *third largest east-flowing* peninsular river of India after Godavari and Krishna.
- **Origin** – Sihawa hills, Dhamtari district, Chhattisgarh.
- **Course** – Flows through Chhattisgarh and Odisha, drains into the Bay of Bengal.
- **Length –** Its total course spans approximately 851 km to 900 km.
- **Catchment Area** – 1,41,600 sq km.
    - Chhattisgarh – 53.9%
    - Odisha – 45.73%
    - Small portions – Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand.
- **Major Tributaries** – Seonath, Hasdeo, Mand, Ib, Ong, Jonk, Tel.
    - *Seonath is the longest tributary.*
- **Key Dam** – Hirakud Dam (Odisha), one of the longest earthen dams in the world.

About the Dispute

- It is a long-standing conflict (since 2016) between Odisha and Chhattisgarh over the sharing of the Mahanadi river's water.
- **Odisha's Stand** – Chhattisgarh's unilateral construction of at least **eight barrages** reduced downstream flow, impacting agriculture, fisheries, and power generation.
    - Odisha calls the Mahanadi its "lifeline" for agriculture, fisheries, and power.
- **Chhattisgarh's Stand** – As an upper riparian state with a larger catchment, it claims the right to utilise water; it also alleges Odisha initiated projects without consultation.

Upper Riparian State – The state where the river originates or flows first & Lower Riparian State – The state downstream, receiving the river's flow after passing through the upper state.

- **1983 Agreement** – Between Odisha and undivided Madhya Pradesh; Chhattisgarh cites it for joint supervision.
- **Joint Control Board (JCB)** – Proposed by Chhattisgarh, but Odisha preferred the tribunal route.

- **Tribunal Formation** – The Mahanadi Water Disputes Tribunal (MWDT) was constituted in 2018 following the Supreme Court directives.
- **Current Status** – Tribunal extended till April 2026; warned states to finalise settlement formula.
- **Legal Framework**
- **Article 262** – Provides for adjudication of *inter-state river disputes* & empowers Parliament to set up tribunals under the 1956 Act.
- **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956 –** Separate tribunals for each dispute, causing delays.
- **In 2019 Amendment –** Single standalone tribunal with multiple benches, strict timelines for awards, aimed at faster resolution.
- **Supreme Court (2016)** – Odisha filed suit under **Article 131** seeking an injunction against Chhattisgarh.
    - **Article 131** – Defines the Supreme Court's exclusive original jurisdiction over legal disputes between the Government of India and one or more States, or between States inter se.

Reference

The Indian Express | Odisha–Chhattisgarh Mahanadi River Dispute

