

The Ken-Betwa River Linking Project

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the funding and implementation of Ken-Betwa inter-linking of rivers project that will be completed in 8 years.

What is the Ken-Betwa Link Project?

- On March 22, 2021, a memorandum of agreement was signed among the Ministry of Jal Shakti and the governments of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to implement the Ken-Betwa Link Project.
- The project envisages transferring water from the Ken river to the Betwa river, both tributaries of the Yamuna.
- It is the first project under the National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers.
- The Ken-Betwa Link Canal will be 221 km long, including a 2-km long tunnel.
- **Phases-** The project has two phases, with four components.
- Phase-I - Involves one of the components — **Daudhan Dam complex** and its subsidiary units such as Low Level Tunnel, High Level Tunnel, Ken-Betwa Link Canal and power houses.
- Phase-II - Involves three components — **Lower Orr Dam, Bina Complex Project and Kotha Barrage.**
- **Special Purpose Vehicle** - An SPV called Ken-Betwa Link Project Authority (KBLPA) will be set up to implement the project.
- **NIRA-** The Centre has set in motion the process of creation of National Interlinking of Rivers Authority (NIRA)
- It will be an independent autonomous body for planning, investigation, financing and implementation of the interlinking of river (ILR) projects in the country.
- The NIRA will have powers to set up SPV for individual link projects.



What is the need for this project?

- The project lies in **Bundelkhand**, a drought-prone region, which spreads across 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- The project is expected to provide
 - Annual irrigation of 10.62 lakh hectares,
 - Supply drinking water to about 62 lakh people
 - Generate 103 MW of hydropower
 - Generate 27 MW of solar power
- The project is expected to boost socio-economic prosperity in the backward Bundelkhand region on account of increased agricultural activities and employment generation.
- It would also help in arresting distress migration from this region.
- It will pave the way for more interlinking of river projects to ensure that scarcity of water does not become an inhibitor for development in the country.

What are the concerns regarding this project?

- **Submergence of Panna Tiger Reserve-** According to the National Water Development Agency

under the Jal Shakti Ministry, the Daudhan dam, to be built on the Ken river will involve a submergence of 9000 ha area.

- This will partly submerge the Panna Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and affect the habitat of vultures and jackal.
- But the project was cleared by the apex wildlife regulator, the National Board for Wildlife, in 2016.
- **Delay in CLMP**- For environment management and safeguards, a Comprehensive Landscape Management Plan (CLMP) has been proposed but it is still under finalisation by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).
- **Pending cases**- The environmental clearance was challenged and is pending at the National Green Tribunal (NGT)
- The stage II (final) Forest Clearance and subsequent state approval in this case from the Madhya Pradesh government is also pending.

What clearances are required for a river linking project?

- Techno-economic clearance - Given by the Central Water Commission
- Forest clearance and environmental clearance - Given by the Ministry of Environment & Forests
- Resettlement and rehabilitation plan of tribal population - Given by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs
- Wildlife clearance - Given by the Central Empowered Committee

What about the earlier cases of river interlinking?

- The Periyar Project was commissioned in 1895 under which transfer of water from Periyar basin to Vaigai basin was envisaged.
- In the 1970s, the then Union Irrigation Minister Dr K L Rao suggested the construction of a National Water Grid for transferring water from water-rich areas to water-deficit areas.
- Later, Captain Dinshaw J Dastoor proposed a Garland Canal to redistribute the water from one area to another.
- But the government did not pursue these two ideas further.
- In August 1980, the Ministry of Irrigation prepared a **National Perspective Plan for water resources development** envisaging inter-basin water transfer.
- The NPP comprised two components.
 - Himalayan Rivers Development
 - Peninsular Rivers Development
- Based on the NPP, the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) identified 30 river links- 16 under Peninsular component and 14 under Himalayan Component.
- Projects such as Parambikulam Aliyar, Kurnool Cudappah Canal, Telugu Ganga Project, and Ravi-Beas-Sutlej were undertaken by the government.

References

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