

In Telangana, a unique irrigation project

If anything is at stake for the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) government in the youngest State of the country for the next elections due in 2019, it is the execution of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP).

Why is it important?

Claimed to be the costliest irrigation project to be taken up by any State till date with an estimated cost of Rs. 80,500 crore, the project holds the key to the TRS government's promise of providing irrigation facility to one crore acres of land under all projects/tanks. The government has already spent Rs. 10,000 crore on the project, including land acquisition, and has allocated Rs. 7,000 crore in the current budget, besides tying up a Rs. 7,400 crore loan from a consortium of banks. Notwithstanding its share of controversies, particularly related to land acquisition for the Mallannasagar reservoir, one of the key components of the project for storage of 50 tmc ft water, the project is making swift progress.

"We are working towards completing the barrages and pump houses at Medigadda, Annaram and Sundilla by December-end next year, with Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao himself monitoring the progress of works live through video streaming from the work spots with the help of high resolution cameras installed there," a senior irrigation engineer, overseeing execution of the project, said.

What's the project?

The Kaleshwaram project is an off-shoot of the original Pranahitha-Chevella Lift Irrigation Scheme taken up by the Congress government in 2007 when Andhra Pradesh was not divided. After the formation of Telangana in 2014, the TRS government redesigned the project on the ground that the original plan had too many environmental obstacles and had very low water storage provision — only about 16.5 tmc ft. After conducting a highly advanced Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey for a couple of months, the government separated the original component serving the Adilabad area as the Pranahitha project and renamed the rest as Kaleshwaram by redesigning the head works, storage capacity and the canal system based on the data of availability of water at different locations along the course of the Godavari and its tributaries.

The Kaleshwaram project has provision for the storage of about 148 tmc ft with plans of utilising 180 tmc ft by lifting at least 2 tmc ft water every day for 90 flood days.

"The project is designed to irrigate 7,38,851 hectares (over 18.47 lakh acres) uplands in the erstwhile districts of Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Warangal, Medak, Nalgonda and Ranga Reddy," the senior engineer said.

As a lot is at stake for the government, it is pursuing various clearances and permissions simultaneously with the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest and the Central Water Commission. Recently, the Ministry of Environment has given its nod for utilising 3,168 hectares (7,920 acres) of forestland, including 302 hectares in Maharashtra. The project requires a total of 32,000 hectares. Following severe opposition from a section of farmers against land acquisition for the Mallannasagar reservoir, the State amended the 2013 Land Acquisition Act to speed up the process.

What's unique?

According to engineers, KLIP has many unique features, including the longest tunnel to carry water in Asia, running up to 81 km, between the Yellampally barrage and the Mallannasagar reservoir. "The tunnel work is nearing completion and the lining work is also in progress," another engineer involved in the project said, adding that the project would also utilise the highest capacity pumps, up to 139 MW, in the country to lift water.

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