

Can't release water for Tapi basin, says Gujarat

Gujarat government has expressed its inability to divert 434 MCM water for Maharashtra in Tapi basin as requested by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis as part of the Par-Tapi-Narmada inter-state river link project.

The project has been mired in controversy for years now, with opposition parties in Maharashtra accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government of sidelining the state's interests at the behest of Gujarat.

The project, and Gujarat government's refusal will now be discussed in Mumbai on June 18 in a meeting of irrigation ministers from five states — Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Goa — in the presence of Arjun Ram Meghwal, Minister of State for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.

With BJP governments in both Gujarat and Maharashtra, the opposition is likely to pounce on the opportunity to corner the ruling party at both places asking it to save state's interests.

The agenda of the meeting, available with *The Hindu*, lists finalisation of Memorandum of Understanding to be signed between Maharashtra, Gujarat and central government regarding inter-state river links Par-Tapi-Narmada and Damanganga-Pinjal.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis in his letter dated July 20, 2017 had requested for compensation of 434 MCM of water to be diverted to P-T-N link from upstream of Ukai dam, one of the largest reservoirs in Gujarat across Tapi river.

"Recently a meeting was taken by Secretary (Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation) on April 20, 2018 among the officials of both the states regarding water sharing in respect of Damanganga-Pinjal and P-T-N link projects," said the agenda.

"During the meeting, the Chief Secretary, Government of Gujarat stated that the inflows into the Ukai reservoir have reduced over the years and Government of Gujarat may not be in a position to accept Maharashtra's demand to divert 434 MCM of water in Tapi basin from upstream of Ukai reservoir," the agenda said. It further highlighted that the issue of diverting 434 MCM of water upstream of Ukai dam to Tapi basin of Maharashtra shall be deliberated and resolved.

The issue has been raised in Assembly several times.

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