

U.P., M.P. SIGN DEAL ON KEN-BETWA LINK WORK

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Dispute Redressal Mechanisms, and the Centre-State Relations

New link planned: A view of the Betwa river in Bundelkhand region near Jhansi. File Photo MOORTHY RV

The governments of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have signed an agreement that nudges forward a long-stalled multi-crore, controversial project to link the Ken and the Betwa rivers and irrigate the water-deficient Bundelkhand region, spread over both States, and provide electricity.

Several obstacles have dogged the project. For one, the project will partly submerge the Panna Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and affect the habitat of vultures and jackals. After years of protests, however, it was finally cleared by the apex wildlife regulator, the National Board for Wildlife, in 2016.

Monsoon blues

Then, the States were unable to come to an agreement on how water would be shared, particularly in the non-monsoon months.

The project involves transferring surplus water from the Ken river in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa river in Uttar Pradesh and irrigating 3.64 lakh hectares in the Bundelkhand region of both States. The project involves building a 77-metre-tall and a 2-km-wide Dhaudhan dam and a 230-km canal. Originally, this phase envisaged irrigating 6,35,661 hectares annually (3,69,881 ha in M.P. and 2,65,780 ha in U.P.). In addition, the project was to provide 49 million cubic metres (MCM) for drinking water supply *en route*.

The original project was conceived in two distinct phases but now they are learnt to be combined. This influences how the entire scheme is funded. The Centre was originally to fund 90% of the cost (Rs. 37,611 crore in 2018) but a final decision on this is still outstanding.

However Uttar Pradesh, it is learnt, wanted a greater share of the water which Madhya Pradesh was unwilling. This prevented the signing of an agreement on water sharing that was ready in 2018.

On Monday, the agreement was signed by both Chief Ministers in an event that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, attended online. "This is a historic moment that is much more than the mere signing on paper. This is to ensure that the water-starved Bundelkhand region will get water for irrigation as well as power." he said in his address.

A statement from the Union Water Resources Ministry said the Daudhan dam would now irrigate nearly 6,00,000 hectares in four districts of Madhya Pradesh alone and 2,51,000 hectares in four districts of Uttar Pradesh. It will provide drinking water supply to 41 lakh people in Madhya Pradesh and 21 lakh in Uttar Pradesh.

Sharing formula

In a "normal" year, Madhya Pradesh would use 2,350 MCM of water and Uttar Pradesh, 1,700 MCM. From November-May, the non-monsoon period, Madhya Pradesh would get 1,834 MCM

and Uttar Pradesh 750. A sticking point was that Uttar Pradesh had demanded nearly 900 MCM and Madhya Pradesh was prepared to release only 700 MCM. In steps ahead, the project needs approval on the share of Centre and State in funding, forming a new organisation — the Ken Betwa Link Project Authority — to execute the project and obtaining stage 2 forest clearance for the Daudhan dam. The project is expected to be ready in eight years.

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