Ken-Betwa River Linking Project

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Context : On a historic occasion, **Prime Minister Narendra Modi** laid the foundation stone for the **Ken-Betwa River-Linking Project** in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh. This ambitious initiative aims to address water scarcity and enhance prosperity in the **Bundelkhand region** by transferring surplus water from the **Ken River** in Madhya Pradesh to the **Betwa River** in Uttar Pradesh.

Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP): An Overview

Objectives and Features

- **Water Transfer**: The project seeks to transfer water from the **Ken River** to the **Betwa River**, both tributaries of the Yamuna.
- **Infrastructure**:
  - A **221-km-long canal**, including a **2-km tunnel**.
  - A **73.8-meter-high dam** on the Ken River at **Daudhan**, located in Madhya Pradesh's Chhatarpur district.

History of the Ken-Betwa Interlinking Project

- **1980s**: Conceptualized as a solution for water scarcity, the project faced delays due to disagreements over water-sharing between Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.
- **2015**: Initial work was planned but stalled due to unresolved disputes.
- **2021**: On March 22, a **Memorandum of Agreement** was signed among the **Ministry of Jal Shakti** and the governments of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, marking a breakthrough.

Phases of the Project

1. **Phase I**:
   - Construction of the **Daudhan Dam Complex**.
   - Development of **low-level and high-level tunnels**, the **Ken-Betwa Link Canal**, and **powerhouses**.

2. **Phase II**:
    - Construction of the **Lower Orr Dam**, the **Bina Complex Project**, and the **Kotha Barrage**.

Implementation Timeline

- According to the **Ministry of Jal Shakti**, the project is expected to be completed in **eight years**.

Regions Benefiting from the Project

The **Bundelkhand region**, spanning 13 districts across Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, will benefit significantly.

- **Madhya Pradesh**: Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri, and Raisen.
- **Uttar Pradesh**: Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi, and Lalitpur.

Key Goals

- Address water scarcity in this **drought-prone region**.
- Promote **regional development** and pave the way for future **river interlinking projects**.

Benefits of the Project

1. **Irrigation**:
    - **10.62 lakh hectares** of annual irrigation:
        - **8.11 lakh ha** in Madhya Pradesh.
        - **2.51 lakh ha** in Uttar Pradesh.
2. **Drinking Water Supply**:
    - Provision for approximately **62 lakh people**.
3. **Power Generation**:
    - **103 MW of hydropower** and **27 MW of solar power**.

Environmental and Social Concerns

Environmental Impacts

- **Deforestation in Panna National Park**:
    - Around **98 sq km** of the park will be submerged, resulting in the loss of **2–3 million trees**.
- **Threat to Wildlife**:
    - **Tigers**: The dam could undermine the success of the **tiger reintroduction program** in Panna National Park.
    - **Gharials and Vultures**: Potential disruption of gharial populations in the **Ken Gharial Sanctuary** and vulture nesting sites downstream.
- **Hydrological Concerns**:
    - Scientists from IIT-Bombay caution about a possible **12% reduction in September rainfall**, disrupting local ecosystems.

Social Impacts

- **Displacement**:
    - **5,228 families** in Chhatarpur district and **1,400 families** in Panna district will face displacement.
- **Inadequate Compensation**:
    - Protests have erupted, particularly in Panna, over insufficient compensation and limited benefits for affected communities.

Controversies and Criticism

- **Wildlife and Environmental Clearance**:
    - The **Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC)** questioned the project's wildlife clearance and economic viability.
- **Violation of Precedents**:
    - Despite established norms, the Union Environment Ministry approved construction within the **core area of Panna Tiger Reserve**.

Conclusion

The **Ken-Betwa Link Project** represents a monumental step in addressing water scarcity and fostering development in the **Bundelkhand region**. While it promises significant benefits in terms of irrigation, drinking water, and power generation, the project raises pressing environmental and social concerns. Striking a balance between development and conservation will be crucial to ensure the project's success and sustainability in the long term.