

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.
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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.
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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**.
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Implementation Timeline

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

Dr. Shivakumar's



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