Centre nudging Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh on Ken-Betwa river interlinking project

The Hindu, New Delhi, November 25, 2019

The government has said it is pushing Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh to make progress on the Ken-Betwa river interlinking project, according to a response to a question in the Rajya Sabha last week.

The project involves transferring surplus water from the Ken river in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa river in Uttar Pradesh and irrigate 3.64 lakh hectares in the Bundelkhand region of both States. The ₹18,000-crore project has been mired in several controversies. The most recent one is a disagreement between the States on the share of water.

‘Consultative manner’

“The government is pursuing the interlinking programme in a consultative manner. Vigorous efforts have been made by the Central government for generating consensus between the concerned States,” Minister of State, Jal Shakti, Rattan Lal Kataria, said in a written response to a query in the Rajya Sabha.

A senior official in the Jal Shakti Ministry told The Hindu, on condition of anonymity, that the project was “still on” but posed environmental challenges. “Other than differences between the States, there are outstanding environmental obstructions too. It is not an easy road ahead.”

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 for drinking water supply en route.

‘No longer valid’

While there’s a 2005 agreement between the two States on how water would be shared, Madhya Pradesh says these assumptions are no longer valid and the only way to meet the increased water requirements would be to include local management projects — the Kotha barrage, Lower Orr and Bina complex that were envisaged in the second phase of the project — in the first phase.