Centre to fund 90% of cost to get Ken-Betwa linking started
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New Delhi: Seeking to quickly set in motion implementation of its ambitious Ken-Betwa river-linking project, the Centre has decided to fund 90% of its cost of over Rs 18,000 crore and planned to get its foundation stone laid by PM Narendra Modi by March.

The plan is to implement the major part of the project in three years so that people of the parched Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh start getting its benefits before the country celebrates 75 years of its independence in 2022.

Both the states had been wary of its huge cost, considering the earlier planned 60 (Centre):40 (State) funding pattern. It is expected that the decision on new 90 (Centre):10 (State) funding pattern would bring them on board to start construction of the project.

The Centre's intent was announced by Union water resources minister Nitin Gadkari at a function here on Wednesday where he asserted that the PM would visit Bundelkhand within two months and lay the foundation stone of the project.

"We will try to ensure its implementation within the next three years and free the Bundelkhand region from the drought-like situation," said Gadkari, adding 90% of the project cost would be shared by the central government.
Since the matter relating to the Ken-Betwa ILR is still pending before the National Green Tribunal as well as a panel appointed by the Supreme Court, experts expressed their surprise over the move and questioned the minister's assurance on the time-line.

"I am not sure if Gadkari’s statement is anything more than what he has been making periodically since he became water resources minister in early September 2017... It is over four-and-a-half months since then", said Himanshu Thakkar of the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People (SANDRP).

Thakkar said, "There is no final forest clearance on Ken-Betwa project. The petitions before the SC appointed Central Empowered Committee about wildlife clearance are not resolved. The issue of taking the power component out of the forest and protected area is yet to be complied with".

Though Thakkar also flagged disagreement between MP and UP for project implementation and noted that even the issue of two phases of the Ken-Betwa project be taken up as one project is yet to be complied with, officials in the ministry said these issues were resolved in principle.