Will meet six-week deadline: official

"The Central government is working for finalising a scheme on the Cauvery issue within six weeks, as stipulated by the Supreme Court, Union Water Resources Secretary U.P. Singh said on Sunday.

“We had internal discussions. We had consultations with States [of the Cauvery basin on Friday]. We have to see other final points of it [the issue]. We are working for it,” Mr. Singh told The Hindu over phone, asked whether the proposed scheme would be implemented within the deadline.

On the controversy over the term ‘scheme’ and the constitution of an implementation mechanism, the Secretary said Section 6A of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act itself had prescribed a scheme.

While implementation mechanisms had been set up to carry out the orders of some Tribunals constituted under the Act, there was also a precedent of the decision of the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal–I being implemented without any mechanism, he said. (The order of this Tribunal, popularly called the Bachawat Award, was published in the gazette in May 1976).

Mr. Singh explained that in the context of the Cauvery, the Tribunal, in its final order, had mentioned a two-tier structure, giving details of the composition. “What we discussed [last week] is some kind of a body which will have full-time members and maybe part-time members.”

Asked whether he had any model for the implementation mechanism in mind, the Union Secretary said he did not. However, he explained that there were two models — the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) and the Narmada Control Authority (NCA). Under the BBMB, assets including dams were being operated and maintained by the Board. In the case of the NCA, operation and maintenance of the assets were with States concerned — Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat — and the Authority’s role was limited to regulatory work and control over the release of water so that “everybody gets his share of water.”

Mr. Singh added that there could be slight variations of these models. “We had discussed all possibilities [with regard to the Cauvery] and hopefully, we will come out with something which is beneficial to everybody,” he said.

When it was pointed out that two bodies — the Cauvery River Authority, headed by Prime Minister and comprising Chief Ministers of the basin States and a Monitoring Committee, comprising officials of the Centre and States — were in place between 1998 and 2013 for implementing the 1991 interim order of the Tribunal, Mr Singh said, “My understanding is that we are not talking of that structure.”

On the absence of an implementation mechanism for the order of the Bachawat Tribunal, a senior official of the Tamil Nadu government pointed out that in 2010, when the Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal- II gave its order in December 2010, it had made an implementation machinery part of the order.

Besides, when the Bachawat Tribunal’s order was given in the 1970s, there was no provision in the Act for any machinery.

The Section 6A was inserted in August 1980 in the light of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal’s order in December 1979, the official added.