More Nods for Ken-Betwa Link Must: Environmentalists 28/12/2016

The article appeared under news item of Hindu edition of Delhi, dated 28.12.2016 indicated Environmentalists challenged Union water resources minister Uma Bharati's remark on clearance to the Centre's ambitious Ken-Betwa river link project, pointing out that there are more nods required before the government can launch the project.

Bharati said that the project is set for take-off as soon as the funding pattern was decided now that the "last hurdle" too had been cleared with the green signal from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL).

It is learnt that the water resources ministry is keen to start work in January itself, in an effort to showcase the work as a 'new year gift' to the people of Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The move has the potential of sending a positive signal to the electorate of UP ahead of the state assembly polls likely in February.

Taking objection to Bharti's remark, water and river conservationists led by Himanshu Thakkar of the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers & People (SANDRP) said, "The NBWL recommendation does not mean the final wildlife clearance as all recommendations for de-notification of protected areas are scheduled to go to the Central Empowered Committee appointed by the Supreme Court and the CEC has to decide if they would like to refer the recommendation to the Supreme Court or not. That step is yet to be taken".

In a letter written to the minister, they said, "The NBWL recommendation is based on a number of conditions, which will actually require a fresh environmental impact assessment".

Officials in the water resources ministry, however, disagree. "The wildlife clearance was a major obstacle. This was indeed the last hurdle, required environment and forest clearances will now be given to the Ken-Betwa project quickly. It is expected that the environment clearance will come in a meeting on Friday while the forest clearance may follow soon."
The Ken-Betwa ILR project is meant to transfer surplus water from Ken river to Betwa basin through a 221km canal. Environmentalists, including Manoj Misra of the Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan, flagged other issues as well before the project work could actually start.