

U.P., M.P., sign agreement on Ken-Betwa interlinking work

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The governments of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have signed an agreement that nudges forward a long stalled multi-crore, controversial project to link the Ken and Betwa rivers and irrigate the water deficient Bundelkhand region (spread over both States) as well as provide electricity.

Several obstacles have dogged the project. For one, the project will partly submerge the Panna Tiger Reserve in M.P and affect the habitat of vultures and jackals. After years of protests, however, it was finally cleared by the apex wildlife-regulator, the National Board for Wildlife, in 2016.

Monsoon blues

Then, the States were unable to come to an agreement on how water would be shared, particularly in the non-monsoonal months.

The project involves transferring surplus water from the Ken river in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa river in Uttar Pradesh and irrigating 3.64 lakh hectares in the Bundelkhand region of both States. The project involves building a 77-metre tall and a 2-km wide Dhaudhan dam and a 230-km canal.

The original project was conceived in two distinct phases but now they are learnt to be combined. This influences how the entire scheme is funded. The Centre was originally to fund 90% of the cost (₹37,611 crore in 2018) but a final decision on this is still outstanding.

However Uttar Pradesh, it is learnt, wanted a greater share of the water which Madhya Pradesh was unwilling. This prevented the signing of an agreement on water sharing that was ready in 2018.

On Monday, the agreement was signed by both chief ministers in an event that Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, attended online. "This is a historic moment that is much more than the mere signing on paper. This is to ensure that the water starved Bundelkhand region will get water for irrigation as well as power. " he said in his address.
