

Telangana Today- 25- January-2023

Ranganayaka Sagar to irrigate 70,000 acres

Kaleshwaram project changed the landscape of Siddipet, says Harish

STATE BUREAU

SIDDIPET

Finance Minister T Harish Rao said the Irrigation Department was now capable of providing irrigation water to 70,000 acres under the Ranganayaka Sagar left canal in two mandals of Siddipet district.

Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao's brainchild, the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme, had changed the landscape of Siddipet as lakhs of acres were brought under irrigation in a short span of eight years, he said after lifting the gates of the left canal of Ranganayaka Sagar, built as part of KLIS near Chinnakoduru on Tuesday to let 100 cusecs of water to meet the irrigation needs of Narayanraopet and Chinnakoduru mandals.

He said the Irrigation Department was ready to enhance the outflows based on the demand from farmers under the left canal. The department also completed the works of the main left canal, distributory canal, minor canals and sub-minor canals in Narayanraopet and Chin-



Finance Minister Harish Rao releasing water from the left canal of Ranganayaka Sagar in Siddipet district on Tuesday.

nakoduru mandals, which would enable the supply of irrigation to 70,000 acres in these two mandals, he said, adding that Narayanraopet

mandal alone had 41 tanks and check dams which would be filled to the brim by releasing water from the Left canal.

The project had 2.64 TMCft of water against its total storage capacity of 3TMCft. Zilla Parishad Chairperson V Roja Sharma,

Superintending Engineer Basavaraj, Executive Engineer Gopalakrishna Rao, AE Pabbathi Ram Reddy and others were also present.

What ails the Ken-Betwa river link project?

Why is the government keen on implementing the project? What are the issues in the clearances given to the river link project? Will they hold legally? What has the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) recommended? An environmentalist perspective:

EXPLAINER

Manoj Mista

The story so far:

On January 18, the Steering Committee of the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP) held its third meeting in New Delhi. It was chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Water Resources, in the Ministry of Jal Shakti, who reiterated that the KBLP was a "flagship" project of the national government and that it "is critical for the water security and socio-economic development of Bundelkhand region". In December 2021, the Union Cabinet approved KBLP at a total cost of ₹44,605 crore. In this project, the national and the Madhya Pradesh governments will link the Ken river with the Betwa river so that the latter can have water the Bundelkhand region in Uttar Pradesh.

What is the Ken-Betwa link?

The link will be in the form of a canal that will be fed by the new Daudhan Dam on the Ken, to be built within the Panna Tiger Reserve. The national government has said that the dam will generate 103MW of hydroelectric power. The linking canal will flow through Chhatarpur, Tikamgarh and Jhansi districts, with the project expected to irrigate 6.3 lakh hectares of land every year.

However, hydrological and ecological experts aren't convinced, mainly because the government's plan is based on a "surplus and deficit" model that they have said has little basis in science. They are also concerned that the project will endanger the water security of Panna. In 2018, environmentalist Ravi Chopra called the idea "nonsense"; in 2021, conservation biologist Raghu Chundawat said that thanks to KBLP, "Bundelkhand will suffer for decades to come".

What clearances has the KBLP received?

India enacted the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 at a critical juncture, when its wildlife was in peril. The key provisions of the Act (Sections 18 and 35) relate to setting aside areas of significance to wildlife as 'sanctuaries' and 'national parks'. Sections 29 and 35(6) restrict human activities within them without prior approval.

Diversion or stopping or enhancement of the flow of water into or outside wildlife sanctuaries/parks is taboo unless doing so is deemed to be necessary to improve and better manage wildlife within a sanctuary or a national park. And in the case of the Panna Tiger Reserve, the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) of the Supreme Court has found such diversion to not be necessary to improve and better manage wildlife in the park.

Additionally, downstream of the national park lies the Ken Gharial Sanctuary, created to protect the critically endangered Gangetic gharial (*Gavialis gangeticus*). The destructive impact of the proposed dam on the flow of water into and outside of this sanctuary should be immediately clear. The CEC is quite firm in its report that "the Standing Committee of the NBWL has not considered the impact of the project on the downstream gharial sanctuary".

The CEC submitted this report to the Supreme Court on August 30, 2019, and that matter remains *sub judice*. The project is also reportedly still to receive full forest clearance. A challenge to its environment approval is also pending before the National Green Tribunal, presumably because the tribunal believes the project must first secure forest clearance. Due diligence and



Still waters: A boy plays in the Betwa river near Jhansi. MONICA TIWARI

expert scrutiny during the project-approval stage are cornerstones of sound environmental governance. Therefore, it was a big shock when, following Cabinet approval, the national government announced the implementation of the KBLP in the 2022-2023 Union budget. It further stated that ₹1,400 crore would be allocated for the project in that financial year.

What about its legality?

There are significant legal problems with the approval granted to the KBLP. The CEC has stated that the, "approval by the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife to the Ken-Betwa link Project has not been proved to be necessary for the improvement and better management of the wildlife therein as provided in Section 35(6) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972..".

This categorical observation was made

vis-à-vis plans to create a high reservoir-dam on the Ken river in the Panna National Park and Tiger Reserve for the KBLP. It concurred with the applicants' prayer at the apex Court; that the wildlife approval given by the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) at its meeting on August 23, 2016, was *ultra vires*.

The Indian government catalysed this approval despite an expert body created by the Standing Committee of the NBWL itself saying that "an independent hydrological study of river Ken is necessary" and that "no developmental project should destroy the ecology of remnant fragile ecosystems and an important tiger habitat in the country".

How will Panna's tigers be affected?

The Panna tiger reserve lost all of its tigers by 2009, requiring a remarkable effort

spanning almost a decade to reintroduce them. Panna is an exceptional tiger habitat because of its deep gorges, which will be drowned if a new dam is built. An illegal approval granted by a national board will bring to naught all the good, hard work of the past. The government is also developing a larger 'Panna Tiger Landscape', but this is not the concession many believe it to be. This landscape should be created in any case for Panna's tigers. Such landscape-level action is also required around most wildlife areas in light of a new global target to protect 30% of global terrestrial and marine areas by 2030, finalised at the COP15 biodiversity conference in December 2022. The question therefore is – why should such plans be designed and deployed only because the heart of a tiger reserve is to be drowned and the park irreversibly fragmented?

In fact, there may not even be enough water in the Ken, a non-perennial river, to meet the projected needs of the Betwa. To forget the needs of the Bundelkhand region. This is why the NBWL expert body mandated an "independent" hydrological investigation of the Ken. Older reports by State agencies had thrown up different, and hence unreliable, projections. Such an independent investigation remains pending. Independent experts have also said that it will be more economical and faster if the governments restored Bundelkhand's erstwhile Chandel-period lakes and ponds and if they replicated the successful field-pond schemes on priority. The region is already blessed with adequate annual rainfall.

Against this background, rushing the KBLP sans due diligence – both technical and legal – will intensify water conflicts between Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh; dash locals' longstanding expectations of irrigation and drinking water; and cost a decade's labour and funds. Ahead of the forthcoming 2023-2024 Union budget, one hopes that we won't be saddled with a textbook loss-loss project.

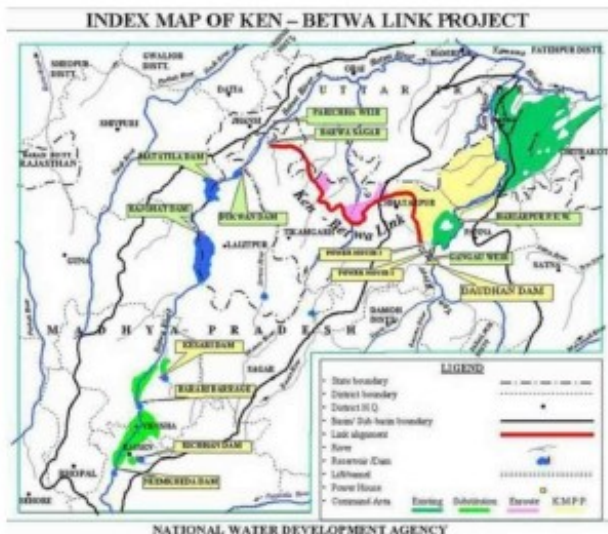
Manoj Misra is a former member of the Indian Forest Service and has been convener of the Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan (Campaign for a Living Yamuna) since 2007.

THE GIST

On January 18, the Steering Committee of the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBPLP) held its third meeting in New Delhi. The Secretary of the Department of Water Resources, in the Ministry of Jal Shakti, reiterated that the KBPLP was a "flagship" project of the national government and that it "is critical for the water security and socio-economic development of Bundelkhand region".

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BJP pushes big-ticket water projects in NK

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Bengaluru: Major political parties are looking at water to quench their thirst for votes in the run-up to the assembly polls in Karnataka. And BJP is no exception.

With about three months to go for state elections, the party is looking to shore up its numbers on grounds of development in irrigation and drinking water projects with a focus on North Karnataka.

PM Narendra Modi's pitch on water and drinking water projects earlier this week may have been a strong indicator of BJP banking on these projects as a platform for its election campaign. "Nationally, up to 11 crore rural households have received tap water connections, with up to 35 lakh rural households receiving the benefit in Karnataka. And when tap water comes to every household, every mother and sister will bless Narendra Modi even more," the PM said in his address at Kodekal, Yadgir district, where the Narayanpur Left Bank Canal (NLBC) modernisation was carried out.

The state BJP is also pushing to implement the Kalasa-Banduri Nala drinking water project, as well as the Upper Krishna III Stage in the Krishna basin, as two key projects for North Karnataka's development.

Water resources minister Govind Karjol told **TOI** that the revised DPR approval for Kalasa-Banduri will have electoral resonance in north Karnataka. "We are

Congress, which held two rallies with its focus on the Kalasa-Banduri and Krishna issues, believes BJP is only "duping" people

definitely expecting a positive response to our efforts to secure the revised DPR approval from the Centre for the Kalasa-Banduri project. People are happy with the decision. The Centre's announcement timed well with the state legislature's winter session that was happening in Belagavi," said Karjol, adding it was only a certain "technical" process that needed to be addressed for the project to be implemented.

According to party functionaries, the project clearance will give BJP a boost in at least Dharwad, Belagavi and Bagalkot districts.

The government is also trying to speed up the possible resolution of the Krishna river water-sharing agreement with the hope of getting it cleared by the Supreme Court. "... Once the SC completes its hearing, the path will be cleared for the Centre to issue the gazette order," said Karjol.

"With the intent of trying to preempt our rally on Mahadayi, the BJP government announced the revised DPR approval for the Kalasa-Banduri project despite having not received forest clearances. They only made the announcement to fool people," said KPCC working president and MLC Saleem Ahmed.

Full report: [toi.in](https://timesofindia.com)