

Inter-Linking of Rivers

What is the issue?

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- The Special Committee for Inter-Linking of Rivers has recently submitted its progress report.

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- In this backdrop it is essential to understand what interlinking seeks to achieve.

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What was the committee for?

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- The SC directed the Centre to set up a special committee following writ petition on 'Networking of Rivers' in 2012.

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- The court directed the committee to submit a bi-annual report to the Cabinet.

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- It also directed the Cabinet to take appropriate decisions.

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What is the mandate?

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- The status reports are meant to be in accordance with the National Perspective Plan.

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- This plan was formulated in 1980 by the Ministry of Irrigation (now Water Resources).

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- The plan was in relation to inter-basin transfers.

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- It comprises of two components: peninsular rivers development and Himalayan rivers development.
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- India also has a National Water Development Agency (NWDA) (1982).
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- It conducts surveys and sees how feasible the proposals for interlinking river projects are.
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What is Inter-Linking of Rivers programme?

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- A national water grid aims to connect various surplus rivers with deficient rivers.
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- It aims to transfer excess water from water-rich to water-deficit regions.
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- This is to help improve irrigation, increase water for drinking and industrial use.
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- Mitigating drought and floods to an extent are also part of the objectives.
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What are the contents of the recent report?

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- The status report of three priority links was shared with the Cabinet. These are:
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- i. Ken-Betwa
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- ii. Damanganga-Pinjal
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- iii. Par-Tapi-Narmada
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- **Ken-Betwa** - The project aims to link the rivers Ken (in the Bundelkhand region) and Betwa and thereby divert the surplus waters of Ken to Betwa.
- Both the rivers are flowing through Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- It goes for meeting the water requirements in the water-deficit Betwa basin.
- Dams will be built across the Ken for storing and transferring water through the link canal.

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- **Damanganga-Pinjal** - The project aims to divert excess water from rivers in western India.
- It is to meet the domestic and industrial water requirements of Greater Mumbai.
- It proposes to move available water at the proposed Bhugad reservoir across the Damanganga and also at the proposed Khargihill reservoir across the Vagh (a tributary of the Damanganga).

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- **Par-Tapi-Narmada** - This proposes to transfer water from Western Ghats to water-deficit regions of Saurashtra and Kutch.
- This would be done via seven reservoirs proposed in northern Maharashtra and southern Gujarat.
- It is an attempt to save water at the Sardar Sarovar project.

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- The recent committee report also talks on the status of other Himalayan and peninsular links.

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What are the concerns?

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- There are significant environmental concerns associated with inter-basin transfer.
- The ecology of every river is unique.
- Letting the waters of two rivers mix may affect biodiversity.
- Besides, it involves construction of a massive network of canals and dams, which would lead to large-scale displacement of people.
- It may make changes to agricultural patterns, and affect livelihoods.
- In addition, rainfall patterns are changing due to climate change.
- So the basins now supposed to be surplus, might cease to be so in few years.
- There are financial concerns as well, related to the projects.
- In 2001, the total cost for linking the Himalayan and peninsular rivers was estimated at Rs 5,60,000 crore.
- The cost is now likely to be substantially higher.
- Also, the cost-benefit ratio might no longer be favourable.

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Source: The Indian Express

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