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# PM Modi lays foundation stone: What is the Ken-Betwa river linking project, environmental concerns around it

The Ken Betwa Link Project envisages transferring water from the Ken river to the Betwa river, both tributaries of the Yamuna. Here's why this was needed, who the project will help, and concerns about its impact on the Panna tiger reserve.

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The Betwa river in Orchha. (Express photo)



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Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of the [Ken-Betwa River Linking National Project on Wednesday](#) (December 25), on the 100th birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The Congress criticised the PM for this, saying the project poses a threat to the

Panna Tiger Reserve.

### What is the Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP)?

The KBLP envisages transferring water from the Ken river to the Betwa river, both tributaries of the Yamuna. The Ken-Betwa Link Canal will be 221 km in length, including a 2-km tunnel. According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, the project is expected to provide annual irrigation to 10.62 lakh hectares (8.11 lakh ha in MP and 2.51 lakh ha in UP) of land, supply drinking water to about 62 lakh people, and generate 103 MW of hydropower and 27 MW of solar power.

It is the first project under the National Perspective Plan for interlinking of rivers, which was prepared in 1980. This plan has 16 projects under its peninsular component, including the KBLP. Apart from this, 14 links are proposed under the Himalayan rivers development plan.

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The Ken-Betwa Link Project has two phases. Phase-I will involve building the Daudhan Dam complex and its subsidiary units such as the Low Level Tunnel, High Level Tunnel, Ken-Betwa Link Canal and power houses. Phase-II will involve three components — Lower Orr Dam, Bina Complex Project and Kotha Barrage.

The Union Cabinet had approved Rs 44,605 crore (at 2020-21 prices) for the KBLP project in December 2021.



PM Modi with Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav during the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Ken-Betwa River Linking Project, in Khajuraho on December 25. (PTI Photo)

December 25

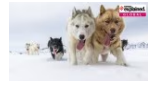
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On Wednesday, PM Modi laid the foundation stone for the Daudhan Dam. Daudhan dam is 2,031 m long, out of which 1,233 metre will be earthen and the rest 798 m will be of concrete. The height of the dam will be 77 m. According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, the dam will submerge about 9,000 hectares of land, affecting 10 villages.

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Infrastructure company NCC Ltd has been awarded the contract for the Daudhan Dam.

### **By when will the project be completed?**

According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, the KBLP project is proposed to be implemented in eight years.

### **When was the Ken-Betwa project agreement signed?**

On March 22, 2021, a memorandum of agreement was signed among the Ministry of Jal Shakti and the governments of [Madhya Pradesh](#) and [Uttar Pradesh](#) to implement the Ken-Betwa Link Project.

### **How was the project conceptualised?**

The idea of linking the Ken with the Betwa got a major push in August 2005, when a tripartite memorandum of understanding for preparation of a detailed project report (DPR) was signed among the Centre and the two states. In 2008, the Centre declared the KBLP a National Project. Later, it was included as part of the Prime Minister's package for the development of the drought-prone Bundelkhand region

In April 2009, it was decided that the DPR would be prepared in two phases. In 2018, a comprehensive DPR, including Phase-I, II and additional area proposed by Madhya Pradesh, was prepared. It was sent to Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and the Central Water Commission in October 2018.

### **Which regions will benefit from it?**

The project lies in Bundelkhand, which spreads across 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. According to the Jal Shakti Ministry, the project will be of immense benefit to the water-starved region, especially the districts of Panna, Tikamgarh, Chhatarpur, Sagar, Damoh, Datia, Vidisha, Shivpuri and Raisen of Madhya Pradesh, and Banda, Mahoba, Jhansi and Lalitpur of Uttar Pradesh. "It will pave the way for more river interlinking projects to ensure that scarcity of water does not become an inhibitor for development in the country," the Ministry said in a statement.

### **What are the project's likely environmental and social impacts?**

The river-linking project has faced intense scrutiny for its potential environmental and social impact. The project will involve large-scale deforestation inside the heart

of the Panna National Park and Tiger Reserve.

Also, over the years, experts have sought that hydrological data of Ken's surplus water be made public for a thorough review or fresh studies. A study published last year by IIT-Bombay scientists even found that moving large quantities of water as part of river linking projects can affect land-atmosphere interplay and feedback and lead to a mean rainfall deficit by up to 12 per cent in September.

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The Supreme Court's Central Empowered Committee (CEC) had questioned the project on multiple counts while examining its wildlife clearance. The CEC had raised questions on the economic viability of the project, advocating for first exhausting other irrigation options in the upper Ken basin.

The submergence of around 98 sq km of Panna national park, where tigers had gone locally extinct in 2009, and felling of about two to three million trees has been one of the most controversial aspects of the project. The Daudhan dam is situated inside the national park.

The Union environment ministry approved its construction inside the core of the Panna tiger reserve, despite no precedent of such heavy infrastructure projects deep within national parks and tiger reserves. The CEC had also pointed out that the project will undo the successful tiger reintroduction that helped the tiger population bounce back from local extinction.

Downstream of the national park, the Daudham dam is also likely to affect the Gharial population in the Ken Gharial sanctuary along with vulture nesting sites, the CEC had noted.



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The dam will displace 5,228 families in Chhatarpur district and 1,400 families in Panna district due to submergence and project-related acquisition. The acquisition process has seen a lot of protests related to what locals have dubbed inadequate compensation and low benefits for Panna district.

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