



drishti

Mekedatu Project: River Cauvery

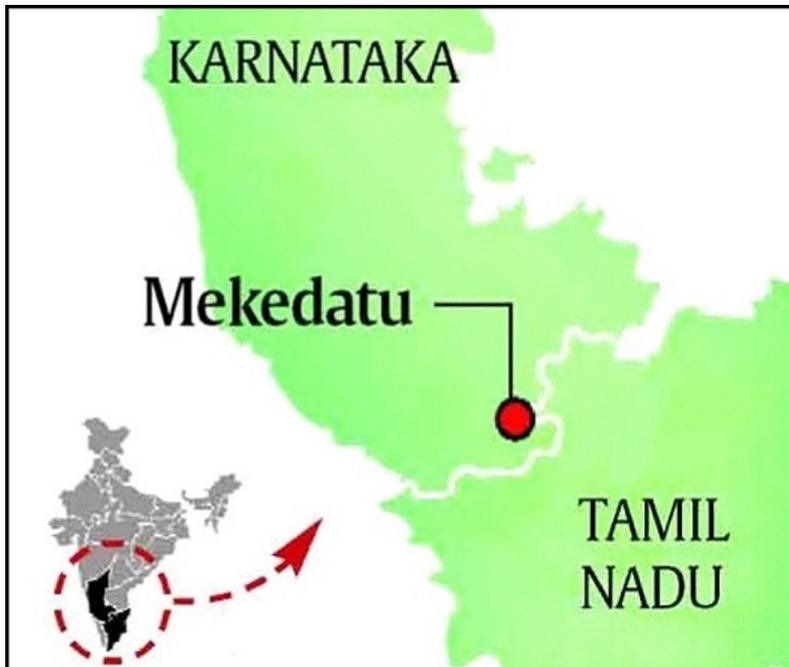
 drishtiias.com/printpdf/mekedatu-project-river-cauvery

Why in News

Recently, the Karnataka government has decided to challenge before the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** its decision to **appoint a joint committee**.

The **joint committee** is supposed to **look into allegations of unauthorised construction activity taking place in Mekedatu**, where Karnataka had proposed to construct a dam across the Cauvery.

Mekedatu, meaning goat's leap, is a **deep gorge** situated at the confluence of the rivers **Cauvery and its tributary Arkavathi**.



Key Points

- **Mekedatu Project:**

- The Rs. 9,000 crore project **aims to store and supply water for drinking purposes for the Bengaluru city**. Around **400 megawatts (MW)** of power is **also proposed to be generated** through the project.
- It was first **approved by the Karnataka state government in 2017**.
- It received **approval from the erstwhile Ministry of Water Resources** for the detailed project report and is awaiting approval from the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.

The approval from MoEFCC is crucial because **63% of the forest area of the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary will be submerged**.

- In 2018, Tamil Nadu approached the **Supreme Court (SC)** against the project even if **Karnataka had held that it would not affect the flow of water to Tamil Nadu**.
- In June 2020, during the **Cauvery Water Management Authority's** meeting, **Tamil Nadu reiterated its opposition to the project**.

- **Reasons for Opposition by Tamil Nadu:**

- Tamil Nadu is **opposed to any project being proposed in the upper riparian** unless it was approved by the SC.
- Karnataka has **no right to construct any reservoir on an inter-state river without the consent of the lower riparian state** i.e. Tamil Nadu in this case.

The project is against the final order of the **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT)** in which the SC held that no state can claim exclusive ownership or assert rights to deprive other states of the waters of inter-state rivers.

- The **CWDT and the SC have found that the existing storage facilities available in the Cauvery basin were adequate** for storing and distributing water so Karnataka's proposal is ex-facie (on the face of it) untenable and should be **rejected outright**.
- It has also held that the **reservoir is not just for drinking water alone, but to increase the extent of irrigation**, which is in clear violation of the Cauvery Water Disputes Award.

Cauvery River Dispute



- **River Cauvery (Kaveri):**

- It is known as '**Ponni**' in **Tamil** also known as **Ganga of the south**, and it is the **fourth largest river of southern India**.
- It is a **sacred river of southern India**. It **rises on Brahmagiri Hill** of the **Western Ghats** in southwestern Karnataka state, flows in a southeasterly direction through the states of **Karnataka and Tamil Nadu**, and descends the **Eastern Ghats** in a series of great falls and **drains into Bay of Bengal** through **Pondicherry**.
- Some of its tributaries are **Arkavathi, Hemavathi, Lakshmana Theertha, Shimsa, Kabini and Harangi**.

- **The Dispute:**

- **Historical Background:**

- As the river originates in Karnataka, flows through Tamil Nadu with major tributaries coming from Kerala and drains into Bay of Bengal through Pondicherry the **dispute therefore involves 3 states and one Union Territory.**
- The genesis of the dispute is **150 years old and dates back to the two agreements of arbitration in 1892 and 1924** between the then **Madras presidency and Mysore.**
- It **entailed the principle that the upper riparian state must obtain consent of lower riparian state** for any construction activity viz. reservoir on the river Cauvery.

- **Recent Developments:**

- From **1974, Karnataka started diverting water** into its four newly made reservoirs, without the consent of Tamil Nadu resulting in a dispute.
- To resolve the matter, the **CWDT was established in 1990** which took 17 years to arrive at the **final order (2007)** on how Cauvery water should be shared between the 4 riparian states in normal rainfall conditions.
- In distress years, a pro-rata basis shall be used, it instructed. The government again took 6 year and **notified the order in 2013.**
- This was challenged in SC which directed Karnataka to release 12000 cusecs of water to Tamil Nadu prompting protests in the State.
- The final verdict of the SC came in 2018 where it declared the **Cauvery a national asset** and largely **upheld the water-sharing arrangements finalised by the CWDT** and also reduced the allocation of water from Karnataka to Tamil Nadu.
 - As per the SC, **Karnataka** would get 284.75 thousand million cubic feet (tmcft), **Tamil Nadu** 404.25 tmcft, **Kerala** 30 tmcft and **Puducherry** 7 tmcft.
 - It also directed the Centre to notify the **Cauvery Management Scheme**. The central government notified the 'Cauvery Water Management Scheme' in June 2018, constituting the '**Cauvery Water Management Authority**' and the '**Cauvery Water Regulation Committee**'.

Way Forward

- The **states need to shed the regional approach** as the solution lies in cooperation and coordination, not in conflict. The **planning must be done at the basin level** to make the solution sustainable and ecologically viable.

- In the long term, there is a **need to recharge the river through afforestation, river linking**, etc and **increased focus is needed on increasing water use efficiency** viz. micro irrigation, **awareness in people to prudently use water** and water smart strategies.

Source:TH