

Apex body on river linking in pipeline

The Hindu, Chennai Dated : 04.03.2020 Written by : T. Ramakrishnan

The Central government is working on the establishment of an exclusive body to implement projects for linking rivers.

To be called the National Interlinking of Rivers Authority (NIRA), the proposed body is expected to take up both inter-State and intra-State projects. It will also make arrangements for generating up funds, internally and externally.

An official of the National Water Development Agency (NWDA), which is responsible for the formulation of proposals of the linking of rivers, said an updated draft Cabinet note has been circulated to other Ministries in the Central government. On receipt of comments, the note will be finalised by the Ministry of Jal Shakti and sent to the Union Cabinet for approval.



'No specific timeline'

The proposal for an apex body on river linking has been under discussion for the past 18 months. However, the official said that as of now, no specific timeline has been determined for the constitution of the Authority. Also, the earlier idea of framing a Bill, envisaging the creation of the NIRA, is not being pursued now.

The subject of establishment of the Authority was discussed at the last meeting of the Special Committee on Inter-Linking of Rivers (ILR) last week in New Delhi. Headed by Union Minister of Jal Shakti Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, the panel includes Irrigation or Water Resources Ministers and Secretaries of States. Since its formation, the Committee has held 17 meetings.

It is being assisted by a Task Force for ILR, which is a committee of experts essentially drawn from the Jal Shakti Ministry, Central Water Commission and the NWDA.

A Tamil Nadu government official said the Centre has not yet shared with States details regarding the new body though it has conveyed to them that it is planning to have an implementation agency for ILR projects.

Once approved, the projects will be pursued as national projects, wherein the Centre will absorb 90% of the cost and the States concerned the rest.

As of now, six ILR projects — the Ken-Betwa, Damanganga- Pinjal, Par-Tapi-Narmada, Manas-Sankosh-Teesta-Ganga, Mahanadi-Godavari and Godavari-Cauvery (Grand Anicut) — have been under examination of the authorities. With regard to the peninsular rivers, the Centre has chosen to focus on the Godavari-Cauvery link than the earlier proposal to link the Mahanadi-Godavari-Krishna-Pennar-Cauvery rivers. The latter has eluded consensus given reservations from Odisha, officials said.

Tamil Nadu situation

In view of Tamil Nadu's not-so-happy experience with its neighbours in getting its due share of water, it has been particular that either the Centre or any of its agencies execute the Godavari-Cauvery link project and look after operation.
