

Mekedatu project: What is it and where does it stand now?

The controversial Mekedatu balancing reservoir project is back in the limelight with the Congress party launching a 100-km-long Padayatra (foot march) demanding its implementation. The project has been in the pipeline for years now, and the Congress party has blamed the BJP for not taking it forward despite ruling both at the Centre and the state. The BJP has, in turn, blamed the Congress party for having done nothing on Mekedatu when it was in power between 2013 and 2018. The project has also faced stiff opposition from Tamil Nadu, which has vowed to get it scrapped. Here's what you need to know about the project:

— SHRUTHI H M SASTRY

What is the Mekedatu balancing reservoir project and what will it do?

The project will come up at Ontigondlu, Mekedatu (literal meaning, goat's leap) at the confluence of Cauvery and Arkavathi rivers, about 90 km southwest of Bengaluru and 4 km from the Tamil Nadu border.

The project was first announced in 2013 by the then law minister T B Jayachandra during the Congress government. It's primarily aimed at supplying 4.75 tmcft (thousand million cubic feet) of drinking water to Bengaluru and surrounding areas but will also generate 400 MW of hydroelectric power.

For this, Karnataka wants to construct a concrete gravity dam at Mekedatu with a storage capacity of 67.16 tmcft.

What will be the project area?

The project requires a total of 5,252 hectares of land. Of this, about 4,996 hectares will be submerged while the actual dam will be constructed in the remaining 256 hectares. Of the total land required, 3,181 hectares fall in the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary, 1,869 hectares in a reserve forest and 201 hectares is revenue land.

How much will it cost?

While the project was previously estimated to cost Rs 5,000 crore, the cost has now escalated to Rs 9,000 crore. And considering that the project has still not been approved by the central government, the actual cost will likely go up further depending on when the final approvals come.

What is the current status of the project?

In January 2019, Karnataka submitted the Detailed Project Report (DPR) to the Central Water Commission (CWC) and later to the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) to get the consent of the co-basin states. The CWMA is yet to approve the DPR because Tamil Nadu, which is the co-basin state, has opposed the project. The lower riparian state has also approached the Supreme Court against Mekedatu, and the matter is pending adjudication.

What's Karnataka's argument?

The Karnataka government has maintained that it is well within its rights to construct the dam as long as it makes sure that Tamil Nadu gets its annual share of water as prescribed by the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal. And since the dam will come up within Karnataka, the state is not violating any law, officials argue. More than that, the state sees Mekedatu as an opportunity to supply sufficient water to meet the ever-growing needs of Bengaluru and the surrounding districts. There is also an acute power shortage, Karnataka has told the Centre. The state also hopes that the dam will boost tourism in the area.

Are there any other hurdles to the project?

Other than opposition from Tamil Nadu, green activists have questioned the environmental price of the project. A major chunk of the land that will be submerged by the dam will be of the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary area, which is a key elephant corridor. The sanctuary is also home to many endangered wildlife species. The sanctuary also acts as a buffer area for wildlife animals such as tigers in the nearby MM Hills and BR Hills. Activists fear that the loss of this space will only lead to more man-animal conflict.

Why is Tamil Nadu opposing Mekedatu?

If the reservoir is constructed, Tamil Nadu fears, Karnataka will hoard water in the dam, thereby cheating it of its share of the Cauvery water. The neighbouring state has argued that as per the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, Karnataka cannot build the dam without the consent of the lower riparian state, which is Tamil Nadu in this case.

Deccan Herald 11-January-2022

Mekedatu: Now, Karjol releases documents to counter M B Patil

'Padayatra is just a popularity contest among Cong leaders'

BENGALURU, DHNS

Water Resources Minister Govind Karjol on Monday released another document to buttress his claim that the Congress delayed the Mekedatu project when it was in power.

Speaking to mediapersons in Bagalkot, Karjol said the then law minister T B Jayachandra had sent a note seek-

ing approval for the project in 2013. The note urged the CM to approve permission for the project, while noting that the project is significant to address drinking water needs and also to overcome power shortage in the state.

This note was later approved by the then chief minister Siddaramaiah and then sent to MB Patil, who was the then water resources minister. "Even



GOVIND KARJOL
Minister, Water Resources

The then chief minister Siddaramaiah gave his approval to note sent by then Law minister T B Jayachandra seeking approval for Mekedatu project in 2013. The CM then sent it to then water resources minister M B Patil. Patil failed to act on it. When so many approvals were given, why didn't Congress begin work on Mekedatu?

then, Patil failed to act on it. When so many approvals were given, why didn't the Congress begin work on Mekedatu," Karjol asked.

Reiterating that the Congress padayatra is politically motivated, Karjol alleged that the whole campaign was just a popularity contest among Congress leaders and that

there was no larger interest of the state involved.

Last week, Karjol released documents to claim that after proposing 4G exemption under KTPP for preparation of the DPR for the project, the Congress government later decided to identify an agency and go for tender process, in spite of the exemption.

'Govt ad irresponsible'

Meanwhile, launching an attack on the BJP, Patil questioned the government on the advertorials on Mekedatu project recently published in a section of the print media. The advertorial was critical of the "delays" in moving files during the Congress government.

"Considering that the Mekedatu project is a sensitive matter which has many legal tangles, the government advertorial is irresponsible. This act by the government needs to be thoroughly investigated by the Chief Secretary, Advocate General and it has to be investigated by a retired judge," he said.

The Hindu 11-January-2022

Two SC judges pull out of Krishna water case

Justice Chandrachud hails from Maharashtra, Justice Bopanna is from Karnataka

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and A.S. Bopanna of the Supreme Court on Monday recused themselves from hearing a dispute among the States of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka on the allocation of the Krishna river water.

Justice Chandrachud said both he and Justice Bopanna



Justices A.S. Bopanna and D.Y. Chandrachud.

had had a word with each other earlier in the day and decided to withdraw from

hearing the case. Justice Chandrachud is from Maharashtra and Justice Bopanna

hails from Karnataka.

Justice Chandrachud explained to the lawyers present that they had noticed that judges similarly placed like them – hailing from the States in dispute – had recused themselves from the case. “We do not want to be targets of invective,” he conveyed their decision.

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2 SC judges pull out of Krishna water case

Some of the lawyers pointed out that the court had been hearing the dispute for the past two to three years. The Bench, however, ordered the court registry to place it before a Bench in which neither Justices Chandrachud nor Bopanna were members after getting the consent of the Chief Justice of India.

The hearing had seen ver-

bal battles among the States, with Telangana submitting that there was no information from Karnataka for the past 14 years about how much water it had diverted. In turn, Karnataka had argued that a lot of water was going to waste and there was a need to harness it for irrigation and to replenish dry regions.

Punjab Kesari 11-January-2022

हिमाचल में घर-घर पहुंचा नल से जल

शिमला, विक्रांत सूद (पंजाब केसरी) : देश के सभी घरों तक नल से जल की उपलब्धता सुनिश्चित करने के लिए केन्द्र सरकार ने जल जीवन मिशन की शुरूआत की। हिमाचल सरकार इस मिशन का सफलतापूर्वक क्रियान्वयन सुनिश्चित कर रही है। प्रदेश सरकार के प्रयासों के फलस्वरूप जल शक्ति विभाग द्वारा पिछले दो वर्षों में 7.93 लाख घरों को नल से शुद्ध जल उपलब्ध करवाया गया, जो पिछले 72 वर्षों में लगे 7.63 लाख नलों से अधिक है। राष्ट्रीय जल जीवन मिशन के अन्तर्गत हिमाचल में हर घर नल उपलब्ध करवाने की दिशा में प्रदेश पूरे देश में अग्रणी कार्य कर रहा है व जुलाई 2022 तक हिमाचल के हर घर में नल से जल देने का लक्ष्य निर्धारित किया गया है, जबकि हर घर नल से जल उपलब्ध करवाने का राष्ट्रीय लक्ष्य 2024 तक रखा गया है।