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# Ken-Betwa River Linking Project may take longer than expected

## *Background*

Annually, India as a whole receives 117 cm of rainfall, but it is not distributed uniformly. While some regions face floods, the other areas reel under drought spells. Thus, it was believed that if an arrangement could be made via which water from surplus areas could be transferred to deficit areas, India could gain on both ends. This is where the idea of interlinking the rivers comes into picture. It was first suggested by **British Engineer Sir Arthur Cotton** when he sought to link the rivers Ganga and Cauvery to aid navigation. Later, in 1982, National Water Development Agency (NWDA) researched over the issue with regard to 30 rivers.

Under former PM, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, it was planned to connect 14 Himalayan and 16 Peninsular rivers by means of canals and reservoirs, in order to ensure water security for irrigation and energy security via hydroelectric power (HEP) projects.

A task force was formed on the directions of Supreme Court in 2002 which submitted an action plan to submit detailed reports by 2006.

In 2005, the Union Government and states of UP and MP signed an MoU in order to link River Ken with the river Betwa. The project is estimated to cost 10,000 crore INR and is expected to be completed within a decade, if all goes well.

Challenges to the project

### 1. Environmental conservation

The project, if implemented, will end up submerging 10% of the **Panna Tiger Reserve** in MP which is known for its tiger population and thriving wildlife. Other environmental concerns include loss of connectivity, fragmentation and threat to Critical Tiger Habitat of the reserve forest. Also, the project may adversely impact **Ken Ghariyal Sanctuary** as one of the barrages will be constructed inside it.

### 2. Finances

The estimated cost of the project is already pegged at **10,000 crore INR**. If the usual delays are taken into account, then it may reach well beyond these estimates. The project may eventually become unfeasible owing to this.

### 3. Monsoonal links

Scientists believe that the policy of interlinking rivers would end up modifying the monsoonal pattern of the country. Going by the heavy dependency over rainfall in our agricultural sector, this may open a new front to fight upon.

### 4. Experiences elsewhere

Empirical studies have converged on the conclusion that such projects often lead to more problems, than solving some. They end up damaging the delicate ecosystem balance, while simultaneously draining public treasury.

### 5. Sharing of expenditure

As per NITI Ayog, the project costs need to be shared between MP government and the central government in the ratio of 40 : 60. However, the Union Ministry of Water Resources, feels that it should be rather 10 : 90, i.e. 90% should come from the Centre.

#### *Way Forward*

The project is expected to provide irrigation to the drought-prone Bundelkhand region spread across UP and MP. Nearly, **3.5 lakh hectares and 14000 hectares of area in MP and UP respectively**, will benefit from the regular supply of water for irrigational and other purposes.

In 2012, after hearing all sides, the Supreme Court gave green nod to the project and hoped for its speedy implementation.

Recently, the project has got all the necessary clearances from environment and tribal affairs ministries paving its way towards its implementation.

Thus, it would be desirable to devise clarity on the funding procedure between NITI Ayog and MoWR, so as to not delay the project any further.

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# Should Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Act be repealed?

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The original Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA) was passed in the year 1976, during the regime of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. It prohibited electoral candidates, Political Parties, M.Ps, Judges and cartoonists to accept foreign funding. The justification of this act was that there should be a restriction of 'foreign interference' in domestic politics.

## The era of liberalization

In the year 1991, the economy was opened up. Even monetary help could be taken from the World Bank, the IMF, etc. It was the era of liberalization and globalization. In the year 2010, amendment to the original FCRA was done. The new FCRA 2010 regulated the acceptance and the utilization of foreign contributions by individuals or associations. It also prohibited the acceptance and utilization of foreign contributions by organizations which were 'of political nature' and conducted activities detrimental to the National Interest.

## FCRA 2010

With the new FCRA in place, the registration of any organization under FCRA has to be renewed every 5 years, otherwise it gets automatically suspended. Moreover, only 50% of the foreign funds can be used for administrative purposes. Recently the Ministry of Home affairs have cancelled licenses of many NGOs and other Civil Society Organizations under FCRA 2010.

## Reasonable Restrictions

The whole issue is that the reasonable restrictions put in the name of 'national interest' on these organizations should be precise and well defined. Such vague terms allow the state to exercise its discretionary power on these Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights speaks about the right to freedom of associations. Clearly, violation of this right is a human rights violation.

## Should the FCRA be repealed?

A strong monitoring and regulation of NGOs and CSOs is definitely needed. Quite often it is seen that, these organizations turn into a money laundering business and may also have links with organized crimes and terrorism. Licenses should not only be cancelled due to political dissent. It is because India is a democracy and the opinion of every section must be considered. Rather, wider aspects like a real threat to the integrity and the sovereignty of the nation should be seen.

A self regulatory independent agency should be formed to monitor the activities of the CSOs. In 2009, a 7member taskforce was set up to create a National Accreditation Council of India (NACI) for this purpose which has not yet been formed. It therefore becomes important today to bring an NACI in place instead of repealing FCRA or making it so aggressive.

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# Centre To Allow Swapping Of Coal

## Why in news?

Power Minister has announced schemes to raise liquidity and enable swapping of coal.

## What are the measures?