

2. Mekedatu Issue

Prelims Syllabus: Rivers

Mains Syllabus: GS-II Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Devolution of Powers and Finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

Why in News?

- Karnataka has demanded that the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) give clearance for the detailed project report (DPR) of Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir Project in its Next Meeting.

What's the Issue?

- Tamil Nadu has protested against Karnataka's move to build a reservoir on river Cauvery at Mekedatu. However, the Karnataka Government has asserted that there is no "compromise" on the Mekedatu project and the state wants to undertake the project.

What's the Way out then?

- The Centre has said the project required the approval of the Cauvery Water Management Authority's (CWMA).
- The Detail Project Report (DPR) sent by Karnataka was tabled in the CWMA several times for approval, but the discussion on this issue could not take place due to a lack of consensus among party states Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.
- Also, as per the Cauvery Water Dispute Tribunal's final award, which was modified by the Supreme Court, acceptance of CWMA would be a prerequisite for consideration of the DPR by the Jal Shakti Ministry.
- Since the project was proposed across an inter-state river, it required approval of lower riparian state(s) as per the interstate water dispute act.

About the Project:

- Mekedatu is a multipurpose (drinking and power) project.
- It involves building a balancing reservoir, near Kanakapura in Ramanagara district in Karnataka.
- The project once completed is aimed at ensuring drinking water to Bengaluru and neighbouring areas (4.75 TMC) and also can generate 400 MW power.
- The estimated cost of the project is Rs 9,000 crore.

Why Tamil Nadu is Against this project?

- It says, 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.

Award by the Tribunal and the Supreme Court:

- The tribunal was set up in 1990 and made its final award in 2007, granting 419 tmcft of water to Tamil Nadu, 270 tmcft to Karnataka, 30 tmcft to Kerala and 7 tmcft to Puducherry.
- The tribunal ordered that in rain-scarcity years, the allocation for all would stand reduced.
- However, both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka expressed unhappiness over the allocation and there were protests and violence in both states over water-sharing. That saw the Supreme Court take up the matter and, in a 2018 judgment, it apportioned 14.75 tmcft from Tamil Nadu's earlier share to Karnataka.
- The new allocation thus stood at 404.25 tmcft for Tamil Nadu while Karnataka's share went up to 284.75 tmcft. The share for Kerala and Puducherry remained unchanged.