

Shanan Hydropower Project

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Context

The Centre has issued an order to maintain the existing situation regarding the Shanan hydropower project, which is currently being disputed by Punjab and Himachal Pradesh.

Shanan Power Project

- The Shanan power project, originally conceived by Col. Batty in 1922, was leased to Punjab for 99 years in 1925.
- The first stage of the project, with a capacity of 48 MW, was completed in 1932.
- The lease agreement was signed between Raja Joginder Bahadur of Mandi and Col BC Batty.
- The water for this project was tapped from the Uhl River (a tributary of the Beas River) and 500 KW of electricity was given to the government for free.
- The project is located in Jogindernagar, Mandi district, Himachal Pradesh.

Concerns and problems related to the Shanan Power Project

- The lease for the Shanan hydropower project is set to terminate on March 2, 2024, marking 99 years since its initiation.
- Punjab stakes a firm claim on the project, referencing its assignment to them during the 1966 geopolitical restructuring and emphasising its seamless oversight since 1932.
- On the other hand, Himachal Pradesh pushes for ownership, appealing to the project's geographical placement within the state and alleging Punjab's oversight, leading to the project's deterioration.

- To guarantee a continuous operational regime for the power station, the federal authorities have provisionally confirmed the existing management status.
- The final verdict rests with the Supreme Court, whose consideration of this issue is scheduled for April 8.

Dispute Over Water Allocation

- Central to the discord between Punjab and Himachal Pradesh is the issue of water distribution.
- Punjab argues that the Shanan Hydro Power Project's existence and functioning could diminish downstream water flow, adversely affecting its agricultural yield and jeopardising the livelihoods of its farmers.
- Conversely, Himachal Pradesh upholds its entitlement to exploit its water resources for hydropower production, a stance rooted in policies related to developmental challenges.

Legal and Regulatory Framework

- The dispute between Punjab and Himachal Pradesh is governed by the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, which provides for a mechanism to resolve conflicts over the sharing of river waters between states.
- But the interpretation and implementation Especially with regard to the sharing of the waters of tribunals are often difficult matters and emphasise existing conflicts between riparian states.

Environmental and Social Concerns

- The Punjab-Himachal dispute is governed by the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act of 1956, designed to settle river water sharing disagreements between states.
- However, the application and interpretation of this law, especially concerning tributary water sharing, can be challenging and may intensify conflicts among states sharing river waters.

Need for Dialogue and Cooperation

- Addressing the Punjab-Himachal disagreement demands a cooperative strategy that considers the interests of both states and protects the overall environmental and socio-economic health of the area.
- Effective dialogue, negotiation, and conflict resolution methods are vital in reconciling divergent interests and identifying solutions acceptable to all parties involved.

Conclusion

- The ongoing debate over the Shanan Hydropower Project highlights the complexities inherent in managing inter-state water disputes in India.
- As the competition for water resources escalates amid increasing demands for economic progress and environmental preservation, active efforts to encourage dialogue, cooperation, and fair distribution of river waters among bordering states

become crucial.

- India's path forward involves embracing a comprehensive and inclusive approach to water management, essential for addressing water conflicts and promoting sustainable development in its varied regions.

Source: [The Indian Express](#)

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q. Discuss the socio-economic and environmental implications of the Shanan Hydropower Project in Himachal Pradesh, highlighting the challenges and opportunities it presents for sustainable development and interstate relations.