

UPSC & STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · [UJIYARI.COM](https://ujiyari.com)**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

Who Counts as Displaced: The Ken-Betwa Protests and the Arithmetic of Rehabilitation

 **THE HINDU**

26 July 2026

ENVIRONMENT**SOCIAL ISSUES****GS3****GS2****GS1**

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 linkedin.com/in/epicbharat**ALSO FROM THE CREATOR****BharatNotes**Free UPSC notes, MCQs, PYQ analysis. **100% Free.**bharatnotes.com → **ADVERTISE****Advertise with Ujiyari**

Reach thousands of UPSC aspirants daily.

 epicbharat@gmail.com

Who Counts as Displaced: The Ken-Betwa Protests and the Arithmetic of Rehabilitation

The Hindu

26 July 2026

GS3

GS2

GS1



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"If the hydrological data underpinning a project's core premise is withheld as sensitive, on what basis can affected citizens contest the project at all?"

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

The dispute at Kupa village is not about whether the Ken-Betwa project should proceed. It is about a definitional question with enormous consequences: is the unit of **rehabilitation** the household or the adult? On that single choice rests the difference between a family of five receiving Rs 12.5 lakh and receiving Rs 62.5 lakh.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

This editorial delivers three GS papers at once. **GS1** gets interlinking of rivers and the geography of Bundelkhand's water deficit. **GS3** gets conservation, the Panna Tiger Reserve and environmental clearance. **GS2** gets the machinery of consent, gram sabha proceedings and rehabilitation law. It is also an unusually good source of *specific figures*, which is what separates a scoring answer from a general one.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The **Ken-Betwa Link Project (KBLP)**, costing Rs 44,000 crore, is India's first river-linking project and the first of 30 proposed links under the **National Perspective Plan (NPP)**. The NPP was formulated in 1980 by the then Union Ministry of Irrigation and the Central Water Commission to move water from perceived-surplus to deficit basins. It has two components identified by the **National Water Development Agency**: Himalayan Rivers Development with 14 links and Peninsular Rivers Development with 16 links.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone in **December 2024 at Khajuraho**, along with that of the Daudhan Dam.

COMPONENT	DETAIL
Mechanism	Transfer of declared surplus Ken water to the Betwa
Infrastructure	Daudhan Dam on the Ken; a 221 km canal including a 2 km tunnel
Power	103 MW hydropower and 27 MW solar
Drinking water, MP	About 4.4 million people across 12 districts
Drinking water, UP	More than 2 million people across 10 districts
Region served	Drought-prone Bundelkhand

On July 19, 2026, Madhya Pradesh police cleared a protest site on the banks of the Barana stream at Kupi village, Chhatarpur, where hundreds of mostly tribal villagers had demonstrated for a fortnight. Activist **Amit Bhatnagar** of the Jai Kisan Sangathan, on hunger strike for 14 days, was hospitalised; around 150 protesters, mostly from Panna district, were bussed back to their villages. He suspended his 18-day fast on July 23 after an assurance that those excluded from rehabilitation would be included.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

The displacement figure is not in dispute. The Union government puts it at **7,193 families** across 14 villages in Chhatarpur and eight in Panna. What is disputed is what a family is worth and who qualifies.

The protesters, per Divya Ahirwar of the Jai Kisan Sangathan, make two demands on KBLP: that **each adult be treated as an individual beneficiary** rather than the family being the unit for the Rs 12.5 lakh package, and that the **eligibility cut-off, frozen since February 16, 2024, be moved to the present date**. The second demand matters because a cut-off frozen years before displacement excludes every household formed since.

The protest also covers two state irrigation projects, **Majhgaon and Runjh**, where the demand is parity with the KBLP package. Here the allegation is procedural: that surveys included people with no connection to the villages or who left years ago, while genuine residents were omitted. Bhatnagar alleged a **Rs 400-crore scheme** built on fake beneficiaries, and claimed the police action came on the day he planned to disclose it. Protesters have also alleged irregularities in the **gram sabha proceedings** through which consent for KBLP was secured.

The state's response has been partly conciliatory and partly dismissive. It approved an additional **Rs 300 crore** for Majhgaon and Runjh, raising compensation from Rs 5 lakh to **Rs 12.5 lakh** per eligible beneficiary. Chhatarpur Collector Parth Jaiswal said a fresh survey identified about **750 additional families**, now included, while calling the remaining demands "invalid" and alleging that some were misleading villagers.

The conservation objection is separate and unresolved. A large part of the project falls inside the **Panna Tiger Reserve**. Per the Jal Shakti Ministry, about **17,101 trees** were identified for felling for the Daudhan Dam and allied works up to July 2025, of which **12,404 have been felled** within the Reserve Forest. Panna's tiger population went locally extinct in 2009 and was rebuilt through reintroduction, making it the standard Indian success story in that field, and one now placed at risk. Endangered vultures, mahseer fish and gharials in the **Ken Gharial Sanctuary** are also of concern.

Underlying everything is an evidentiary vacuum: the Centre has not released the **hydrological data** for the two basins, citing sensitivity because they are subsets of the international Ganga basin. The very premise of the project, that the Ken has surplus water, therefore cannot be independently examined.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Use a **three-question frame** and resist the temptation to argue for or against river-linking in the abstract.

- ❶ **Is the surplus real?** Without basin hydrology in the public domain, “surplus” is an administrative assertion, not a verified quantity.
- ❷ **Is the consent real?** Gram sabha consent in scheduled areas is a **statutory** safeguard, not a formality. Allegations of flawed proceedings go to the legality of the project, not merely its popularity.
- ❸ **Is the compensation adequate?** A package is adequate only relative to what is lost. A household losing land, common property resources and a livelihood system is not made whole by a one-time cash transfer indexed to an outdated cut-off.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Picture three concentric circles around the Daudhan Dam. The **innermost** is submergence: 7,193 families, 22 villages, land lost outright. The **middle** is ecological: the Panna Tiger Reserve, 17,101 trees marked and 12,404 already gone, gharials downstream in the Ken. The **outermost** is the beneficiary zone: 6.4 million people across 22 districts of two states receiving drinking water. Public policy defends the project by pointing outward and answers protest by pointing inward. The honest question is whether the outermost circle can be reached without the innermost bearing the entire cost.

WAY FORWARD

- **Publish the hydrology.** A project premised on surplus water must permit that premise to be tested. Ganga-basin sensitivity can be addressed through aggregation, not blanket withholding.
- **Move the cut-off date.** A static eligibility date in a multi-year project systematically excludes newly formed households; indexing it to actual displacement is administratively trivial.

- **Audit the beneficiary lists independently.** Allegations of fake beneficiaries and omitted residents are testable. A third-party social audit resolves them faster than confrontation does.
- **Honour the statutory consent architecture.** The Forest Rights Act, 2006, PESA, 1996 in scheduled areas, and the LARR Act, 2013 with its social impact assessment exist precisely for this situation.
- **Sequence conservation mitigation.** Compensatory afforestation and tiger-corridor protection should be verified before further felling, not promised after it.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has repeatedly examined interlinking of rivers and its feasibility, and has separately tested displacement, rehabilitation and the Forest Rights Act. This editorial connects the two streams that are usually prepared apart.

Practice question: “Interlinking of rivers resolves a hydrological problem by creating a social and ecological one.” Critically examine with reference to the Ken-Betwa Link Project. (250 words)

Interview angle: If the hydrological data underpinning a project’s core premise is withheld as sensitive, on what basis can affected citizens contest the project at all?

Sources: The Hindu, PIB

Source: Who Counts as Displaced: The Ken-Betwa Protests and the Arithmetic of Rehabilitation — [Ujjayari.com](https://ujjayari.com) | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

RELATED DAILY ARTICLES

26 Jul **First Villages, Not Last: PM Interacts with Viksit...**

24 Jul **India's Paddy Fields Emerge as Global Methane Hotspots**

23 Jul **DeepDATA: A Citizen-Science App to Map India's Deep-Sea...**

22 Jul **The Teesta Stage-VI Tunnel Disaster and Himalayan...**



CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[in linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/07/th-ken-betwa-displacement-panna-protests-2026/>

ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

BharatNotes

Free UPSC study platform — subject-wise notes across all 4 GS papers, Prelims MCQs, Mains answer frameworks, PYQ analysis & progress tracking. **100% Free • No Login Required.**

[Start Preparing → bharatnotes.com](#)

📢 OPPORTUNITY

Advertise with Ujiyari

Reach **thousands of serious UPSC & State PCS aspirants** daily through our PDFs, website, and social channels.

Ideal for: Coaching institutes • EdTech platforms • Book publishers • Exam prep apps

[✉ epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)

Write to us for rates & media kit

Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs · ujiyari.com · bharatnotes.com