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River linking plan challenges

What is the issue?

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- Union government is planning for a large scale river linking plan.
- Several issues must be sorted out first before the plan is taken up.

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What is the river linking plan about?

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- The Union government is all set to begin work on an estimated \$87 billion plan to connect around 60 of India's largest rivers.
- Work is now set to link the Betwa and Ken rivers which pass through Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh
- Once complete, it is expected to help end farmers' dependence on fickle monsoon rains, bring millions of hectares of cultivable land under irrigation.
- It will also help generate thousands of megawatts of electricity.

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What are the challenges for the project?

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- **Constitutional Mandate** -Water is listed as entry 17 in List II of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

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- While the government has initiated discussions to bring the subject under the concurrent list, it may not be an easy task to achieve.
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- If there are changes in the political dispensation in various States, the government in a State that is upstream may refuse to share water with downstream States.
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- **Water resource accounts** - This will provide an accounting framework that enables the integration of specialised physical resource sector data with other information on the economics of water supply.
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- India is technically poor with respect to data related to the water sector.
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- Unlike other countries, the Central Statistics Office has neither attempted nor funded studies to gather data on water tables at an all-India or State level.
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- The absence of a well-informed water policy reflects a knowledge governance gap.
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- **Agricultural commitment**-There is a dearth of studies in the Indian context unlike other countries addressing the water resource gap by analysing water flows embodied in agriculture products.
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- At a subnational scale, Virtual Water flows are not consistent with relative water scarcity.
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What needs to be done?

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- The government should pay more attention to its 'more crop per drop' mission, and to what extent Indian agriculture follows this practice.
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- Water resource accounting makes it possible to capture direct, indirect and induced water demand in the process of economic production.
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- It need to be carried out at all the major crops at subnational levels is a must for efficient planning of a scarce resource such as water.
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- A full-fledged architecture to solve water sharing disputes between states is needed.

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Source: The Hindu

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