? Kishau Multipurpose Project Agreement Strengthens Upper Yamuna Water Security and Supports Yamuna Rejuvenation

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Recent Developments:

- On **15 September 2026**, six Yamuna-basin participants, **Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi**, signed an agreement in New Delhi to advance the long-pending **KishaMultipurpose Project**. The agreement followed the consensus reached in June 2026 and was signed in the presence of the Union Home Minister and Union Jal Shakti Minister.
- The project had remained stalled for about **eight years**, mainly because of disagreements over cost-sharing, water allocation and the distribution of project benefits and burdens. The latest agreement creates a framework for resolving these concerns through greater **Central financial assistance** and a revised benefit-sharing arrangement.
- The project will now proceed towards **Union Cabinet approval**. The Centre has agreed to bear **90% of the cost of the water component**, while the remaining 10% will be shared by the six participating states.

What is the KishaMultipurpose Project?

Location and River:

- The **KishaMultipurpose Project** is a proposed storage and hydropower project on the **Tons River**, a major tributary of the **Yamuna River**.
- The project site lies along the **Himachal Pradesh–Uttarakhand border**, covering the Sirmaur district of Himachal Pradesh and Dehradun district of Uttarakhand. The project is being implemented through **KishaCorporation Limited**, a joint venture of the governments of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

Major Project Features:

- The proposed structure is a **232.6-metre-high concrete gravity dam**, making it a major storage intervention in the Upper Yamuna basin.
- The current project documentation provides for a **660 MW hydropower capacity**, comprising four units of 165 MW each, with hydropower generation treated as an incidental benefit of the storage project.
- The project is designed to provide about **1,324 million cubic metres (MCM) of live water storage**, support irrigation over approximately **97,076 hectares**, and provide water for drinking and industrial requirements.
- The project is expected to generate substantial clean hydropower, with official project documentation estimating about **1,379 million units**, while the latest government communication cites approximately **1,476 million units** of annual generation; the variation reflects differences in project-stage estimates and documentation.

Why is the Project Important?

Upper Yamuna Storage Deficit:

- The KishaProject is significant because the **Upper Yamuna basin historically lacked adequate storage infrastructure** between the Yamunotri region and the Okhla Barrage.
- The project is therefore intended to regulate seasonal water availability by storing monsoon flows and releasing water in a controlled manner for **irrigation, drinking water, industrial use and downstream river requirements**.

Link with the 1994 Upper Yamuna Agreement:

- The project is linked to the **1994 MoU on the sharing of Yamuna waters** among the basin states. The agreement established a framework for allocating the utilisable waters of the Upper Yamuna among the participating states.
- The original arrangement involved **undivided Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Delhi**. After the creation of Uttarakhand in 2000, Uttar Pradesh's allocation was subsequently divided between Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.
- The Upper Yamuna storage strategy envisaged three major projects, namely **Kishau, Lakhwar and Renukaji**, to improve regulated water availability in the basin. The KishaProject therefore forms part of a broader basin-level water-management approach rather than being an isolated dam project.

Water Security for Northern India:

- The project is expected to strengthen water availability for **Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Uttarakhand**, while its location in the Himalayan region gives it importance for downstream water regulation.
- Rajasthan's allocation is particularly relevant for water-stressed areas such as the **Shekhawati region**, where additional water availability can support drinking-water and irrigation requirements.

Inter-State Cost-Sharing Dispute:

Himachal Pradesh's Concerns:

- The principal obstacle to the project's progress was the disagreement over how the financial burden should be distributed among the participating states.
- Himachal Pradesh had raised concerns because the project involves **submergence and displacement within the upstream area**, while a substantial proportion of its water benefits would accrue to downstream states.
- The state also questioned the earlier expectation that it should bear a significant portion of the **power-component cost**, particularly when the downstream states would receive substantial water benefits.

2026 Resolution Mechanism:

- In June 2026, the Centre proposed to finance **90% of the water component**, substantially reducing the financial burden on the participating states.
- A separate arrangement was created for Himachal Pradesh under which its allocated water would be transferred to **Delhi and Rajasthan**, while these two states would share the cost of Himachal Pradesh's portion of the power component.
- The arrangement therefore attempts to align **costs with actual benefits**, allowing Himachal Pradesh to receive compensation for its contribution while downstream states obtain additional water resources.

Water Allocation and Benefits:

Storage and Water Distribution:

- Under the latest arrangement, the principal storage allocations are approximately **Haryana — 633 MCM, Uttar Pradesh — 411 MCM, Rajasthan — 124 MCM, Delhi — 80 MCM and Uttarakhand — 34 MCM** , while Himachal Pradesh's allocated share is subject to the agreed transfer mechanism.

- The project is also intended to provide **drinking and industrial water**, besides supporting irrigation and regulated downstream flows.

Yamuna Rejuvenation:

- The project has acquired additional significance because its regulated releases are expected to increase water availability in the **Yamuna**, particularly during periods when natural flows are relatively low.
- The Union Government has explicitly linked the project with the broader objective of a **cleaner and rejuvenated Yamuna**, making the project relevant to river-basin management as well as conventional irrigation and hydropower planning.

Significance for Cooperative Federalism:

Inter-State Water Governance:

- Rivers cross administrative boundaries, making **inter-state coordination** essential for their effective management.
- The Kishaagreement demonstrates how financial restructuring, negotiated benefit-sharing and Central assistance can help participating states move towards consensus on a complex water-infrastructure project.
- The project also illustrates the importance of institutions such as the **Central Water Commission, Ministry of Jal Shakti and Upper Yamuna River Board** in coordinating water allocation and infrastructure planning across state boundaries.

National Project Framework:

- The KishaProject has been treated as a **National Project**, under which the Centre provides substantial financial assistance for the water component. KishaCorporation's project documentation records the declaration of the project as a National Project in **2008**.
- Such Central support can reduce the financial constraints faced by Himalayan states while enabling downstream states to receive the benefits of basin-level water infrastructure.

Environmental and Social Concerns:

Submergence and Rehabilitation:

- Large storage projects can create significant **submergence, displacement and livelihood impacts**, particularly in ecologically sensitive Himalayan areas.
- Earlier assessments indicated substantial land submergence and impacts on settlements in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Therefore, **land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement** must remain integral to project implementation.

Himalayan Ecology:

- The project area forms part of a fragile Himalayan environment where construction activity can interact with **slope instability, landslides, biodiversity loss, sedimentation and downstream ecological flows**.
- Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management Plans should therefore examine cumulative impacts rather than assessing the dam only as an individual infrastructure project.

Balancing Development and Ecology:

- The project highlights the wider policy challenge of balancing **water security, renewable energy and irrigation requirements** with environmental sustainability and community rights.
- Effective implementation should maintain adequate **environmental flows**, strengthen disaster-risk management and ensure transparent rehabilitation of affected communities.

Way Forward:

Basin-Level Planning:

- The KishaProject should be implemented as part of an integrated **Upper Yamuna basin-management strategy**, with coordinated planning for Kishau, Lakhwar and Renukaji.

Sustainable Implementation:

- Project authorities should ensure scientifically robust **seismic and geological assessments, environmental-flow management, catchment-area treatment, sediment management and climate-resilient dam design**.

Cooperative Federalism:

- The new cost-sharing framework should be supported by transparent mechanisms for **water accounting, benefit sharing, dispute resolution and monitoring**, reducing the possibility of renewed inter-state disagreements.

Rehabilitation and Local Participation:

- Communities affected by submergence should receive timely **compensation, rehabilitation, livelihood restoration and social infrastructure**, with local participation incorporated into implementation.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Key Concept — Cooperative Federalism in Water Governance:

- **The KishaProject illustrates how inter-state water disputes can be addressed through negotiated benefit-sharing, Central financial assistance and basin-level planning rather than relying exclusively on adjudication.**

Mains-Ready Line:

- *"The Kishaagreement demonstrates that India's water-security challenge is not merely one of water scarcity but also of storage, distribution, institutional coordination and equitable benefit-sharing across federal boundaries."*