

## 'Common disputes panel soon'

The Centre is hopeful of getting the Inter-State River Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2017 passed in the second part of the budget session of Parliament to establish a unified tribunal to resolve all water disputes in the country.

Union Minister of State for Water Resources Arjun Ram Meghwal, who was here to chair the Regional Conference of Southern States on Water Resources on Tuesday, stated that the bill introduced in Lok Sabha on March 14 last year was being supported by almost all the States.

The Bill cleared by a parliamentary committee proposes to streamline the adjudication of inter-State river water disputes and make the present legal and institutional architecture robust.

"The bill was introduced as part of the 'one country, one tribunal' idea to resolve the river water disputes among States in a fixed time-frame since the existing arrangement of having several tribunals is dragging on disputes. One tribunal will speed up dispute redressal mechanism in a speedy and effective manner," Mr. Meghwal said speaking to newsmen after the conference which was not open for media.

He stated that different tribunals were hearing disputes and the States were approaching courts on the orders of the tribunals.

Chairman of the Central Water Commission S. Masood Husain, when asked on the sidelines, said that the Bill had provisions to resolve disputes in a maximum timeframe of five years. All existing disputes in various tribunals would be transferred to the unified tribunal once it was in place.

On the recent judgement of the Supreme Court in Cauvery water dispute, the Union Minister said the Centre would set up Cauvery River Management Board and Cauvery Regulatory Authority to resolve the pending disputes.

As per the directions of the apex court the two bodies were required to be in place in six weeks, Mr. Meghwal noted.

The Union Minister stated that the conference had also agreed upon basin-wise meetings of States to resolve the outstanding issues faster. The regional conferences for northern, eastern and western States would also be convened in the coming months.

Water Resources Ministers T. Harish Rao (Telangana), Mathew T. Thomas (Kerala) and Malladi Krishna Rao (Puducherry) represented their States, while Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu were represented by their officials. Chief Secretary of Telangana S.K. Joshi, Joint Secretary of MoWR Sanjay Kundu, officials of National Water Development Agency, CWC and Krishna and Godavari river boards also attended.

***The existing arrangement of having several tribunals is dragging on disputes.***

***Arjun Ram Meghwal, Union Minister of State for Water Resources***

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