

HYDRO PROJECTS IN NORTH EAST INDIA**Union Environment Minister has no time for the indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh**

In early March 2012, a 16 member delegation of indigenous people from the interiors of the far off Lohit basin in Arunachal Pradesh travelled all the way to Delhi to meet the Union Environment Minister and express their concerns about the proposal of large number of big hydro projects in the basin. They waited for 48 hours, the minister had no time for them. They ultimately left without meeting her, but after sending the following letter dated March 15, 2012 to her. To the best of our information, the minister has not yet found time to respond to them.

From: People's Forum for Project Affected Families, Anjaw, Arunachal Pradesh

To: Ms Jayanti Natarajan, Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests (Independent Charge), Paryavaran Bhawan, CGO Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110003

Subject: Mega Hydro projects in Lohit Basin in Arunachal Pradesh

Respected Minister,

We learn that the Government of India, including your ministry and Go AP, is considering construction of at least six mega hydropower projects on the main stem of Lohit River i.e. DEMWE-I 1750 MW, DEMWE-II 1250 MW, HUTONG-II 1250 MW, KALAI-II 1200 MW and KALAI-I 1250 MW alone, in addition to several more on the tributaries of the Lohit River. Firstly we should add that this basin is situated in a unique geo-climatic situation that is full of thick natural forests and biodiversity, seismically active zone-V, erosion prone, landslide prone, flood prone area with a river that carried heavy silt load and that is close to China border, the tribal dominated population of our area has already faced the adverse consequences of Chinese aggression. Lastly, this is happening at a time when climate change is hovering as a big threat on everyone, but particularly on people who are directly dependent on natural resources like the forest, the biodiversity, the river and the mountains. Even precautionary principle requires that taking up any big project in such a region, all studies are done comprehensively and in credible way. This has clearly not happened.

1. Even more we the tribal and indigenous people of Lohit valley are randomly settled at the basins of the river Lohit since our inception and practicing jhum cultivation and existing with fragile ecology, the valley population constitutes the 75% population of the entire district and 05 administrative circles are also located in the basin. With coming up of such kind of mega HEP, the whole of the population, administrative blocks and major habitation of the district would be permanently damage and seriously affected. Even if the GOAP comes up with R & R policy there is no such kind of fertile Terrains,

plateaus, and land alternately available for establishment of settlement areas for the homeless and landless poor people.

2. However, there has been absolutely no decision making process involving the people of this valley, in a free, prior and informed way before deciding to take up these projects. Even if one of these projects were to come up in Lohit Valley, it would create sufficient permanent adverse impacts on society, culture, people, forests, river, biodiversity, their livelihoods, and environment. But the governments of India and Arunachal Pradesh have decided to go ahead with these projects, signed, MOUs and the committees like the Expert Appraisal Committee of your ministry have already decided that all these projects can be taken up. Even a committee chaired by you have decided to give a go ahead to the massive 1750 MW Demwe Lower Hydropower Project, the fist of these projects. The Arunachal Pradesh government has already taken up front money from the developers who signed the MOUs. Can this be accepted in any society that calls itself humane and democratic? We do not find this acceptable. This is also not legally tenable considering that these are sixth schedule area, considering the implications of Panchayat Extension to Schedule Areas Act, Forest Rights Act and such other legal provisions.

3. It is not that we lack electricity or that these projects are being planned for electricity (for us). We all belong to Anjaw district that is already self sufficient in electricity (see for ex: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Anjaw-shines-in-hydro-power-sector/articleshow/11333208.cms>). This has been possible through hydro projects of capacity less than 1 MW. There is a huge potential of such sub-MW capacity projects possible to be constructed in the tributaries of Lohit basin like TIDDING, DALAI, DAV, HALAIPANI, CHOWO, LATI, KATHANG, KULUNG, KLANGDI, SARTI, WARTI, CHOMU, DONG, KHARWTI, MUSHAI PANI and many more tributaries exist in the basin, which has neither been assessed, nor realised. If we can realise this potential through a participatory process, we believe we will have sufficient power for whole of the valley and the state and more to export to the North East Region and may be beyond. This must be done first and till that is done no big hydro projects should be taken up.

4. As far as the projects proposed on main stem of the Lohit river are concerned, the participatory process that is mentioned in para 2 above can be taken forward only if there is a comprehensive assessment of impacts of the projects across the basin. This has not been done. The Lohit basin study done by the WAPCOS cannot qualify for such a study. It has not looked at, for example the social impacts of the projects at all. Nor has it done any

options assessment, nor has it done cumulative impact assessment since the impact assessment of the individual projects is still to be done. How can cumulative impact assessment be done without impact assessment of individual projects? Most importantly, no study of WAPCOS would be acceptable to the people of the Lohit Valley and other social and environment conscious people for two main reasons. Firstly, WAPCOS is an organisation under the Union Water Resources Ministry, and Union Water Resources Ministry is basically a pro dam lobby. WAPCOS also does other pro dam studies like the feasibility reports and Detailed Project Reports for Big dams, such studies are done in favour of Big dams and an organisation that is doing such business cannot be entrusted to do an environment or cumulative impact assessment study. Secondly, WAPCOS also has had very poor track record and has done very poor quality EIA and CIA reports. Hence, in future, we will not accept any reports done by such organisations. Once a credible basin study, including options assessment is done, full such study should be made available to each gram sabha of the Lohit Valley, and a credible process of decision making should start from there. Before that none of the big hydro on the main stem of Lohit river should be taken up. The same conditions should apply for any big hydro projects on tributaries of Lohit River.

5. Here we would like to bring to your attention that ours is a completely tribal area with total tribal population of about 16500 according to population census 2011. In such a small place when such mega projects are taken up, it will not only destroy our society, culture, villages, forests and river, but also the onslaught of thousands of out side populations will create huge political, religious, social and cultural problems for our tiny population.

5A. The impact assessments of religious holy sites like NIMKEY and TAILUNG popularly known as PARSURAM KUND is not yet done for its preservation and maintenance as this two holy sites falls under parameter of submergence due to HEP lower DEMWE.

6. The construction of Mega HEP at the sensitive zone of Indo-China border areas of Arunachal Pradesh would also pose serious threat to the national security as witness in the late year 1962 when Chinese aggressed our country up to the plains of Lohit and even today the Chinese counterpart controversially claims Arunachal Pradesh as integral part of china. Secondly, mega projects would inevitably invite in fluxion of thousands of migrant labours and employees which would tremendously effect to the intelligence concerned to the national security.

7. As said earlier the Lohit valley is vigorously rich in flora and fauna and has fragile ecological system of water, forest and wildlife. The main wildlife and endanger species like mishmi takin (*Bodorcas taxicoalr*), Goat antelope, musk deer (*muschus chrysogester*), Bear (black and brown), Capelangur (a Himalayan monkey species, Hornbill, Spotted Leopard, Hollock gibbon,

Flying bat, wild boars, wild dogs and many others. The impact study of such endangered species and their perseverance is surprisingly sidelined.

8. We would urge that till the process described in para 3 and 4 is completed, no work on any of the big hydro projects should be taken up in Lohit basin. The ongoing survey work should also be stopped on proposed projects upstream of Lower Demwe project.

09. In future, kindly ensure that there is participatory process at gram sabha level before work on Environment Impact Assessment or Cumulative Impact assessment is started and also full copies of these studies are available to all gram sabhas in language and manner that people there can understand. We would also request you to change the EIA notification to ensure that even projects of capacity greater than 5 MW also required EIA, Environment Management Plan, Environment Clearance and Public hearings. Moreover, the practice of taking up front premium should be stopped and declared illegal.

10. Kindly also note that even if some hydropower projects were to be considered in Lohit River Basin or in any other River basin in Arunachal Pradesh for electricity needs beyond Arunachal Pradesh, a credible democratic process involved all concerned in the state and downstream states should be taken up before any such project is even considered. Not doing such a process will only invite social unrest, like the one being witnessed in Assam now.

So many of us have taken great pains to come to Delhi all the way from one of the remotest corners of India. We had no option but to do that since our lives and future our societies are at stake. We hope you will take these issues seriously enough. We will await your detailed responses on each of these points.

By Shri Behenso Pul, Chairman, Peoples Forum For Project Affected Family. Educated Colony, Lohit District Tezu, A.P. on behalf of 16 member delegation from the Lohit basin in Arunachal Pradesh

Copies submitted for kind information and necessary action:

1. His Excellency the Governor of ArP, Itanagar.
2. The Hon'ble Chief Minister of ArP, Itanagar.
3. The Hon'ble Minister, Tribal Affairs, Govt of India Shashtri Bhawan (New Delhi).
4. The Hon'ble Minister Rural Development, Govt of India, New Delhi.
5. The Hon'ble Minister DONER, Govt of India, N Delhi.
6. The Hon'ble Minister Environment & Forest Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar.
7. The Member of Parliament Rajya Sabha, New Delhi
8. The Hon'ble Member of Parliament 2-East Parliamentary Constituency, New Delhi.
9. The Hon'ble MLA 45-Hayuliang Constituency, Itanagar.
10. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Govt. of ArP.
11. The Deputy Commissioner, Anjaw & Lohit District, Govt of ArP