

# Govt of India's Fundamentalist push for large storage projects EXPOSED ONCE AGAIN

In a shocking development, the Union govt plans to impose large water storage projects on state govts even when state govts are against such projects, bypassing the constitutional provisions & democratic norms. According to official minutes from the Union Ministry of Power, in a specially called high level meeting on Aug 1, 2005 between heads of Union Ministries of Power, Water Resources, Central Water Commission, Central Electricity Authority and heads of central public sector undertakings like the NHPC, NTPC, NEEPCO, SJVNL & THDC, it was decided that steps would be taken so that govt of India can impose its decisions on building large storage dams on state govts, bypassing the constitutional provisions and democratic norms.

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Right in the beginning of the meeting, the secretary (Power) criticised the Arunachal Pradesh govt's decision to allow only run of the river type power projects in that state.

**Looking for ways to force state govts** In fact, in the meeting, the Union Power secretary asked the Union Water Resources and Central Water Commission, if "there was any legal instrumental available with Govt of India to oblige the state govts to agree to the storage schemes". This fundamentalist attitude is not only anti people, anti environment, anti economy, but also is against the federal constitutional structure of India. The fundamentalist attitude of the union govt has been evident in history of dam building over the last sixty years and it is clear that there is no impact on that mindset of the disastrous experience of large dams in India.

The minutes records the response to the question: "CMD, NHPC and Sr. Joint Commissioner (Eastern Region), Ministry of Water Resources informed that there were some provisions in the Brahmaputra Board Act by virtue of which the hydro electric schemes in the Brahmaputra basin cannot be implemented unless the same were cleared by the Board. Some guidelines have also been issued in the National Water Policy".

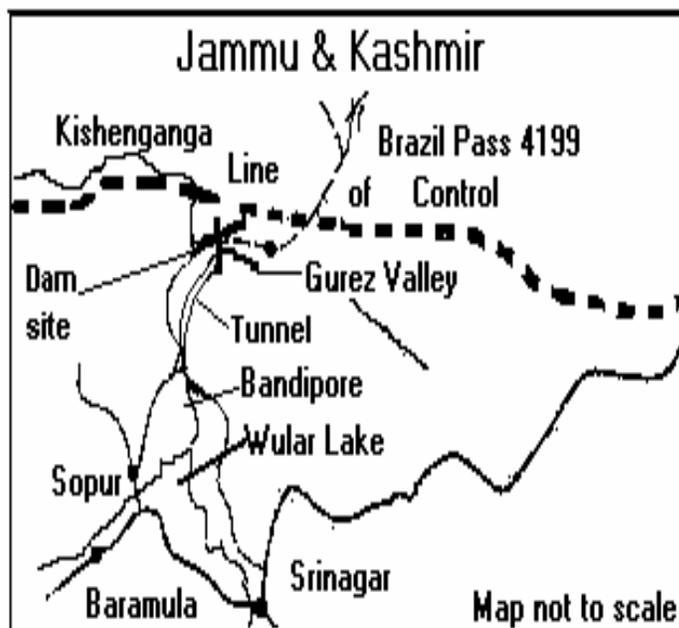
The Union Power Secretary was not happy with this. So the minutes record: "Secretary (Power) stated that there was an urgent need to frame laws / policy instrument" to ensure that large storage projects can be taken up. "Secretary (Power) requested Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources to bring out a policy paper in this regard at the earliest so that the DPRs of storage

schemes could be prepared and these schemes could be implemented without any hindrance".

**Kishanganga HEP** The mindset of the govt got exposed from the account given in the minutes about how the change of status of the Kishanganga HEP happened and impacts there of.

Following successful protests by the affected people during public hearing of the Kishanganga HEP Gurez Valley in Jammu & Kashmir, inhabited by shin tribes, the govt and the NHPC had to change the Kisanganga HEP from a storage project to a largely run of the river project, with following changes.

Parameter	Earlier proposal	New Proposal
Ht of the dam, m	77	37
Gross storage capacity, MCM	220	18.35
Live storage capacity, MCM	173.5	10.95
Length of the reservoir, km	11.2	4.5
Submergence area, sq km	7.65	2.00



**Kishenganga river diversion to Wular Lake**

**Savings** In stead of seven villages (8523 population) earlier, one village (population 821) will face submergence and the cost of the project would be reduced by Rs 700 crores.

**New Tenders** On July 11, '06 (The Tribune) NHPC invited Prequalification bids under International Competitive bidding for turnkey execution of the project, canceling the earlier notice dated 290905.

#### **No change in Power Generation**

Such big changes in the project, CMD, NHPC informed a govt of India meeting that, have been possible "without much change in energy generation". The question arises, if that was the situation, why does the union govt hanker for greater storage projects which necessarily have very large submergence of lands and displacement of people.

**The Bursar threat** As if to compensate for the "loss" in Kishanganga, Union Water Resources Secretary and Union Power Secretary asked NHPC, which is preparing the Detailed Project Report of the Bursar HEP in J&K, to ensure that "full storage capacity admissible under the treaty should be built". These words from the official minutes of the meeting signify the mindset of the Union Water Resources and Power Ministry that they see big storage projects as good in themselves, irrespective of whether they serve any useful purpose or not, whether they are optimum solutions or not, whether it is possible to achieve the objective with projects with lower social and environmental impacts or not.

**Khab Plans** One of the projects that the Govt of India would have in mind while pushing this new policy is Khab dam on Sutlej River in Kinnaur district in Himachal Pradesh. Here, in a decision that is reversal of what happened at Kishenganga, a run of the river project is sought to be converted to a storage based large dam. A strong movement of local people is trying to thwart this attempt, see the reports below.

**Thus one of the decisions of the meeting was: "Ministry of Water Resources/ Central Water Commission will come out with a suitable Policy Instrument to ensure that the sites identified for storage schemes are not converted into ROR schemes by the States and the decision of the Central Govt to develop the sites as storage schemes should be binding on all the States."**

**The Decision** Thus one of the decisions of the meeting was: "Ministry of Water Resources/ Central Water Commission will come out with a suitable Policy Instrument to ensure that the sites identified for storage schemes are not converted into ROR schemes by the States and the decision of

the Central Govt to develop the sites as storage schemes should be binding on all the States."

Needless to conclude, this will be a very dangerous instrument if it materializes. At the moment any such instrument does not seem to enjoy legal backing in view of water being a state subject in India's constitution. However, we need to be very vigilant. If the decisions taken at the confidential meeting were to become a policy than, the implications would be particularly catastrophic for the North Eastern states where Arunachal Pradesh govt has taken a policy decision of not taking up any storage based hydropower projects.

**SANDRP** (Another version published by [indiatogether.org](http://indiatogether.org))

### Run of the River and Storage Projects

In storage based hydropower projects, the dam height is such that it creates large water storage capacity behind the dam. The height from which water falls from behind the dam to the riverbed in the downstream portion is used to generate power.

As against that, the ROR projects are not supposed to have big storages for generating hydropower. The diversion dams in ROR projects are thus of lower height and create storage equivalent to, typically, requirement for generating power for a few hours. The water diverted from the dam in such projects flows through several km long head race tunnel and the fall in gradient through this length is used for running the power turbines. The tunnel length can vary from a couple of km to over 40 kms in some cases. The water re-enters the rivers after generating power at the end of such tunnels.

However, it should be noted that there is no precise limit for storage for a project to be defined as run of the river project. The definition has been stretched many times to include projects with much larger submergence area (e.g. Maheshwar HEP on Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh).

There is now increasing trend for building ROR projects in place of storage projects, particularly in hilly regions, where big gradient becomes available in short distance. The difficulty in getting public and govt acceptance for large submergence areas for storage projects is one of the causes for this trend. The storage projects typically have multiple objectives, as against ROR projects basically being only for hydropower generation.