

THDC & CWC Claims about Tehri: Truth versus the Hype

The claim of THDC, CWC and Uttarakhand Chief Minister that in absence of Tehri dam, Rishikesh and Haridwar (and even western Uttar Pradesh, as the Uttarakhand Chief Minister repeatedly claimed including in Indian Express interview on July 23, 2013) would have been washed away is completely baseless and unfounded, nothing but a hype. Facts show that if Tehri were not there, the water level in downstream areas may have gone up earlier than it eventually did on June 18 (as per CWC, peak level in Rishikesh was 340.8 m and in Hridwar at 295.1 m), but lower than the water levels of June 18. THDC and CWC should refrain from making such claims as they are more like adding salt to the wounds that the people of the state are now experiencing and where dams and hydro projects have played a big role.

From all accounts, it is clear that peak flood of 6900 cumecs in Bhagirathi River on which Tehri dam is situated, occurred on June 16 and the peak flood of 11000 cumecs in Alaknanda occurred on June 17, so it would not be rational to add the two peaks happening at different points of time to claim that Tehri saved downstream areas. If Tehri was not there, there could have been floods in downstream a day earlier, but that does not mean peak levels would have been higher than what was the case with Tehri Dam. From the records available on the websites of Central Water Commission (http://cwc.gov.in/Reservoir_level.htm), Central Electricity Authority (http://cea.nic.in/daily_hydro.html) and Northern Region Load Despatch Centre (<http://nrlcdc.org/>), it is clear that water level in Tehri reservoir rose from 757.3 m on June 16 to 776.8 m on June 18 (water levels for June 17 is not available for some strange reason), this translated to increase in water storage by about 502 Million Cubic meters (MCM).

THDC claims that they experienced peak inflow of 244 000 cusecs and moderated that to an outflow of 14000 cusecs. To achieve this moderation for a day would take storage capacity of around 563 MCM, so it is plausible that they achieved this moderation on June 16, when Bhagirathi was experiencing peak flow. However, as we noted earlier, the peak flow in Alaknanda happened on June 17.

THDC should make hourly figures of flow in Bhagirathi and Alaknanda on June 15-20 public, as well as outflow from Tehri on each of those days, level of Ganga at Devprayag, Haridwar and Rishikesh, so that everyone can assess the reality of their claims. Such information should routinely be in public domain.

It may also be added that areas downstream of Tehri dam faced avoidable and unprecedented flood disaster in September 2010 (for details see p 20 of Aug-Sept 2010 issue of *Dams, Rivers & People*: http://sandrp.in/drp/DRP_Aug_Sept_2010.pdf). On that occasion the sudden water release from the dam also damaged the downstream Koteshwar project, suffering losses of over Rupees hundred crore. If the dam operation is not done properly, we may be in for a repeat later this season. It should also be recalled that Tehri is a ticking time bomb in the context of large earthquake that is imminent in the state as seismologists are telling us.

Tehri dam has also been cause of large number of landslides along periphery of the reservoir. People affected by the Tehri dam have still not been rehabilitated. Rs 1,483 crore (17% of the project cost), has been spent, THDC claims, on rehabilitation and resettlement for families belonging to old Tehri town, 24 villages fully affected, 88 villages partially affected, 13 villages due to acquisition of land for project / colonies. Recently (<http://www.energylineindia.com/> on July 23, 2013), the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), having affected relevant studies on THDC's R&R scheme, has said that better standards of PAPs and infrastructure facilities be deployed at resettlement colonies. This speaks volumes about the claims about R&R by the THDC. The dam has also not been delivering the peaking power it could, as noted by Central Electricity Regulatory Authority. The dam is also silting up much faster than envisaged, reducing its water holding and power generation capacity. *In fact, CWC has failed miserably in its flood forecasting. Uttarakhand Chief Minister, CWC and THDC need to put their house in order rather making unfounded claims.*