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CM misleading public on flood moderation by Lower Subansiri – KMSS

The Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, is misleading the public by saying that the Lower Subansiri project will be effective in moderating floods. Even by NHPC's own claim, the flood moderation component in Lower Subansiri is 'negligible'.

This was admitted by NHPC to members of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) in December 2008 when the project was being examined by them for clearance (**see Annexure 1**). This is an annexure to a letter written by Mr. T. Mandal, Executive Director (Planning) on December 5, 2008 to some members of the NBWL Standing Committee before the meeting of the committee on December 12, 2008.

NHPC has claimed that sufficient flood moderation may be possible if Upper, Middle and Lower Subansiri are operated in tandem (together). But even as per NHPC's own claim the contribution of Lower Subansiri in flood moderation is **negligible**.

Nor is it possible for NHPC to operate Upper, Middle and Lower Subansiri projects together to achieve the claimed flood moderation benefits as the Upper and Middle Subansiri projects have been handed over to separate private parties by government of Arunachal Pradesh.

Therefore, as per NHPC's own admission the CM's claim is false – the project has 'negligible' flood moderation component.

Even if the project supposedly had a big flood moderation component, the experience in the rest of the country shows that dams (including those with flood moderation objectives) have been responsible for causing floods. In theory, storage dams can moderate floods. In practice they do exactly the opposite and create devastating floods in the downstream areas, due to their wrong operations.

To illustrate, in August 2006, Surat city on Tapi River in South Gujarat experienced the worst floods in its history due to sudden release of 7 to 10 lakh cusecs of water from the upstream Ukai dam. At least 150 people were killed, 80% of the city was under water, over 20 lakh people were trapped inside the flooded city, without flood, drinking water, milk, electricity or communication for four days and nights.

The Ukai Dam story was repeated in many river basins across India in 2006, including the Mahi, Sabarmati, Chambal, Narmada, Krishna, Godavari and Mahanadi basins. Sudden high releases of water from dams (many of them having high pre-monsoon storages) were the prime reason for the flood damages in these basins.

The floods of 2006 were in no way unique. Some such instances of mismanagement of dams leading to avoidable floods in downstream areas include: Mahanadi floods in Orissa in September 2008 due to wrong operation of Hirakud dam, the floods in Damodar basin in 2009, the floods in Punjab in 1988 and in 2010 due to sudden releases from Bhakra and Pong dams, the floods in Krishna basin in late Sept-early Oct in 2009 due to wrong operation of Upper Krishna, Tungabhadra, Srisailem and Nagarjunsagar dams, among others. Over the years, India has seen its flood damages increase even though the total area supposedly protected by flood-control engineering projects has grown.

If flood moderation dams have not been effective in moderating floods and have in fact caused floods across the country, who do we think that dams will be able to moderate floods in the Northeast? Let us not talk engineering theory. Let us see the practical experience of lakhs of people affected by dam-induced floods. Let the government of India hold accountable the engineers responsible for devastating floods by dams across the country before giving the people of the Northeast fancy mega dam solutions for moderating floods. The same is true for our CM. Let him do his homework of the experience of the rest of the country with flood moderation dams. As far as Lower Subansiri is concerned, as clarified by NHPC itself, even the officially claimed flood moderation component is 'negligible'.