

February 25, 2010

Dr. Manmohan Singh,
Prime Minister of India,
New Delhi.

Sub: Assamese concerns on downstream impacts of mega dams in the Brahmaputra river basin continue to be treated casually by New Delhi; KMSS will disallow 1750 Demwe Lower dam granted environmental clearance recently

Dear Dr. Singh,

Greetings from Assam! The Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) is a major peasant's movement in the Brahmaputra floodplains and we had sent a joint submission to you on behalf of diverse civil society groups on the issue of downstream impacts of dams in September 2009 (attached). We are seriously concerned that New Delhi continues to treat the issue casually, as evident from the environmental clearance granted to the 1750 MW Demwe Lower project on the Lohit river earlier this month on February 12th without impact assessment and public consultation in downstream Assam. We have decided that we will no more allow this authoritarian and undemocratic decision-making on mega projects impacting our social and environmental security in the Brahmaputra floodplains.

While the UPA government claims to be pro-people, there is a serious democracy deficit in the planning and execution of mega-infrastructure projects being promoted by powerful developers and being involuntarily thrust on us. How can such anti-people approaches be termed 'development'? As a first step we would like to inform you that we will disallow the 1750 MW Demwe Lower project on the Lohit river to be built as we cannot allow the Central Government to trample over our rights and resources.

In spite of widespread protests in downstream Assam in recent years, the Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF) in New Delhi granted the recent clearance to Demwe Lower without detailed downstream impact assessment and public consultation in Assam. Instead they have asked for a post-clearance downstream impact study, which is also restricted only till where the Lohit river meets the Noa – Dihing river. Earlier in October 2008 the MoEF had imposed a similar post-clearance downstream impact study condition on the 1500 MW Tipaimukh hydroelectric project, but no work has started so far on the study! We are seriously questioning this form of shoddy environmental decision-making by the MoEF and its Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) on River Valley Projects, which treats virtually all projects as a *fait accompli*, as has been the experience in the Northeast so far. We will not accept this kind of farcical governance any more. Members of the MoEF expert committee seem to be merely acting as 'yes men' ignoring important concerns and the ministry itself acting on behalf of powerful developers. Enough is enough.

The biggest concern is that no lesson has been learnt from the experience of the 2000 MW Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project which is currently embroiled in major downstream impacts related conflicts. Although a downstream study was commissioned after protests, the developer (NHPC) has continued work in violation

of the interim recommendations of the committee conducting the study. Moreover, NHPC has gone ahead and signed a MoU (agreement) with the Arunachal Pradesh government on January 27th for the Lower Subansiri project without waiting for the final study to be over. The committee of the Assam Legislative Assembly investigating the downstream impacts of dams is also yet to table its report, but NHPC has ignored this too.

The Assam government had in a December 2009 reply to independent MLA Bhubon Pegu in the Legislative Assembly indicated that they are unaware of the fact that the 1750 MW Demwe Lower project was recommended for clearance by the MoEF expert appraisal committee. Therefore, it is clear that the state government has not been consulted while giving clearances to upstream mega projects. We are particularly pained that you have been insensitive to the downstream concerns in Assam, even though you are a Member of Parliament from the state.

We hope that you ensure that the situation changes urgently. But till the decision-making on mega dams in the Northeast becomes truly democratic (and not merely function as diktats from Central authoritarian technocracies to the people of the Northeast), we will have to resort to civil disobedience and thwart projects such as the 1750 MW Demwe Lower project on the Lohit river in interest of the people of the Brahmaputra floodplains in Assam.

Thanking you,

Sincerely,

Akhil Gogoi
General Secretary, Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS)