



■ Seven dams have been planned on the Parshuram Kund, a pilgrim spot on the Lohit river in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh.

NIVEDITA KHANDEKAR / HT PHOTO

Hydel projects threaten tribes



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TEZU/HAYULIANG (ARUNACHAL PRADESH): As many as 13 hydel projects proposed on the basin of Lohit river — snaking through Lohit and Anjaw districts of Arunachal Pradesh — have ruffled more than a few feathers.

Seven projects are planned on the main Lohit river in run-of-the-river cascade arrangement and six others on the tributaries in the Lohit basin with combined generation potential of more than 7,000 MW. Only the first project, Lower Demwe has so far got clearance.

Environmental issues have already been discussed, but the possible threat to the vulnerable demography of the Mishmi, the dominant community inhabiting the two districts, has not been debated.

The community with a population of about 25,000 — the 2001 census put it at 22,944 — feels the influx of labourers will threaten their land. In the past migrant labourer, who had come for road construction, married local girls and settled here.

Abray Manyu, advisor to late

CM Dorjee Khandu, asked, "What is the need for so many projects? God knows, what diseases these thousands of labourers will bring in?"

Suraj Tayang, general secretary, Lohit Valley Dam Affected Citizens' Forum said the officials of Demwe Athena company have claimed 3,000 labourers will be brought in only in the third year — the peak year for construction. "What we plan to do is to keep track of the permits issued and ensure that labourers go back after the work is over."

Incidentally, Nimkeh (abode of Gods in Mishmi) — a sacred place for Mishmis will be submerged during the Lower Demwe project — is not mentioned in the Environmental Impact Assessment report.

According to AGM (Civil) Demwe Athena Power Ltd RK Singh, the company is aware of its significance and has located the site away from it.

Dr KH Paliwal, principal secretary, power and coordination, Arunachal Pradesh, rubbished claims of change in demography. "Once operational, labourers will go back and minimum staff needed for operations will remain at the site," he said.

For now, the Mishmis are keeping their fingers crossed. (As part of Inclusive Media Fellowship by www.im4change.com)