

# Arunachal govt thirsts for power, river be dammed

**WORST FOOT FORWARD?** Activists raise green concerns over construction of reservoirs on Lohit, but govt pushes ahead anyway

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## TEZU/HAYULIANG (LOHIT AND ANJAW DIST):

The Lohit and Anjaw districts of Arunachal Pradesh, inhabited mostly by the Mishmis, are set to witness a sea change. The Amik Tulo, as the Lohit river is referred to by the local population, is likely to be dammed.

Well, dammed — actually — though most environmentalists can't see the difference.

The Arunachal Pradesh government has signed a number of MoUs with private firms under the public-private partnership model for as many as 13 hydro-power projects in the two districts, seven on the Lohit and rest on its tributaries.

However, the Mishmis don't seem to be against these projects. "We are not against tapping hydro-power potential as a national asset for revenue. But the process of signing MoUs under the PPP is faulty," Khapriso Krong, a former minister residing in Tezu, says.

The public hearing for Lower Demwe, the first project in the cascade arrangement, had its share of problems. Residents complain that not everybody was given a chance to raise their objections.

Samdang Tawsik, joint secretary of the Wakro-based Cultural and Literary Society of Mishmis (CAL-SOM), says, "Even before the public hearing, the company did not maintain transparency. God

knows what it will do once the construction begins."

The company he refers to is the Demwe Athena Power Ltd. Athena AGM (Civil) RK Singh says, "We had earlier given due publicity, and continue to do so for this project. We are going ahead with our presentations in each of the affected villages."

The state, meanwhile, defends the



■ Officials test the quality of soil and rock as part of a plan to construct hydel projects on Lohit river in Arunachal Pradesh. NIVEDITA KHANDEKAR/ HT PHOTO

projects. "What's wrong with the PPP model? We accepted this model to tap additional hydel potential. Moreover, public sector companies such as NHPC and NEEPCO also have a number of projects," says Dr KH Paliwal, principal secretary, power and coordination, Arunachal Pradesh.

But how safe is tapping additional potential, asks Himanshu Thakkar of South Asia Network of Dams, River and People. "If the requirement of the region and the options for it are considered, it is very clear that there is no need for so much power. These projects are imposed from outside, for outside."

"Besides ignoring the need to assess the social impact, the authorities are clearly ignoring the northeast region's fragile geology and biodiversity. There has been no credible assessment for viability or cumulative impact assessment," Thakkar warns, recalling the massive 1950 earthquake — the biggest in independent India — which

altered the topography around Sadia, less than 200 km downstream of the first hydro-power project on the Lohit.

However, Paliwal sticks to his stand. "Compared to thermal power, hydel projects bring in clean energy," he says. "There is no denying that the country needs more power. By opting for hydel power over thermal, we are looking at the betterment of the environment."

The seven projects planned on the main stem of the Lohit river, with MoAs already signed for six of them, are the 1,450-MW Kalai-I, 1,200-MW Kalai-II, 1,250-MW Hutong-II, 280-MW Anjaw, 1,050-MW Demwe Upper and 1,750-MW Demwe Lower.

The six projects on the tributaries of the Lohit are the 98-MW Tiding-I, the 68-MW Tiding-II, the 96-MW Raigam, the 21-MW Kamlang, the 99-MW Gamliang and the 75-MW Noahdihing.

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