

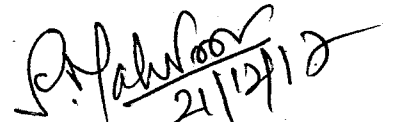
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The News Clippings on Water Resources Development and allied subjects are enclosed for perusal of the Chairman, CWC, and Member (WP&P/D&R/RM), Central Water Commission. The soft copies of clippings have also been uploaded on the CWC website.


21/12/17
SPA (Publicity)

Encl: As stated above.

Deputy Director (Publication)


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For information of Chairman & Member (WP&P/D&R/R.M.), CWC and all concerned,
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Q/C

News item/letter/article/editorial published on 21.12.2017 in the

Hindustan Times
Statesman
The Times of India (N.D.) ✓
Indian Express
Tribune
Hindustan (Hindi)

Nav Bharat Times (Hindi)
Punjab Keshari (Hindi)
The Hindu
Rajasthan Patrika (Hindi)
Deccan Chronicle
Deccan Herald

M.P. Chronicle
Aaj (Hindi)
Indian Nation
Nai Duniya (Hindi)
The Times of India (A)
Blitz

and documented at Bhadrath(English) & Publicity Section, CWC

Panel clears hydro project on Chenab under Indus treaty

NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Setting in motion India's ambitious plan to utilise its share of water from western tributaries of Indus river, an expert panel of the environment ministry has cleared the 800 MW Bursar hydroelectric project in J & K. Bursar is one of the three projects on river Chenab and its tributary which India wants to complete in a time-bound manner within the Indus Water Treaty (IWT).

Under the 1960 Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan, India is permitted to construct storage capacities on the western rivers up to 3.6 million acre feet (MAF) for various purposes including domestic use.

The Bursar hydroelectric project is a storage project in which the flow of water can be regulated not only for this project but all downstream projects such as Pakal dam, Dul Hasti, Rattle, Baglihar, Sawalkot and Salal hydroelectric projects.

Though the environment ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) for River Valley and Hydroelectric Projects had in October deferred granting clearance to the Bursar project, it finally cleared the project without a site visit.

Since the visit was not possible before June 2018 due to poor weather conditions, the panel granted its green signal without the site visit, an indication of the urgency to expedite the ambitious project.

The dam site of the project is located near village Pakal on River Marusudar which is one of the major tributaries of Chenab. The storage provided is intended to be used for additional power generation during lean flow months and releasing regulated flow in the downstream.

Under the IWT, water of eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas and Sutlej) are allocated to India while the country is under obligation to let flow the water of the western rivers (Indus, Jhelum and Chenab) to Pakistan.

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Reconsider the Rules

The 2017 Wetland Rules limit monitoring and omit important wetland types



NEHA SINHA

Earlier this year, a judgment by the Uttarakhand High Court, stating that Ganga and Yamuna rivers are "living entities", captured the national imagination. It is worth noting that wetlands, the other major water-based ecosystem apart from rivers, are at a moment of policy transition in the country. This year, a new legal framework for wetlands was passed, the Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017, replacing the earlier Rules of 2010. Also this year, the Supreme Court passed an order directing States to identify wetlands in the country within a stipulated timeframe.

Going forward

The 2017 Wetland Rules have been criticised for doing away with strong wetland monitoring systems and omitting important wetland types. At the same time, the Supreme Court order directs States to come forward and notify wetlands. What then could be the way forward?

The 2010 and 2017 Rules for wetlands both emphasise that the ecological character of wetlands ought to be maintained for their conservation. 'Ecological character' refers to processes and components which make the wetland a particular, and sometimes unique, ecosystem. For example, as lagoons like Chilika (Odisha) and Pulicat (Tamil Nadu/Andhra Pradesh) are characterised by a mix of saline and fresh water, the flows of each type need to be maintained; river flood plains contain wetlands that require conservation so they can re-fuel the river with fish and other aquatic life during flooding.

In the 2010 Rules, some related criteria were made explicit, such as natural beauty, ecological sensitivity, genetic diversity, historical value, etc. These have been omitted in the 2017 Rules. There are a few reasons why this is problematic. First, there is multiple interest around wetlands. Multiple interests also have governance needs, and this makes it absolutely necessary to identify and map these multiple uses. Leading on from this, and second, it is crucial to identify ecological criteria so that the wetlands' character can be maintained. The key to wetland conservation is not just understanding regimes of multiple use – but conserving or managing the integrity of the wetland ecosys-



tem. Finally, restriction of activities on wetlands will be done as per the principle of 'wise use', determined by the State wetland authority. Whether wise use will include maintaining ecological character remains to be seen. Under the new Rules, no authority to issue directions, which are binding in nature to desist from any activity detrimental to wetland conservation, has been prescribed to State wetland authorities.

Salt pans are an example how one use (of making salt) has trumped the other (of environmental balance). Salt pans as 'wetlands' have been omitted from the new Rules. They were identified as wetlands in the 2010 Rules, as they are often important sites of migratory birds and other forms of biodiversity. The omission in the 2017 Rules suggests that while saltpans do exist as wetlands, they do not require any conservation or ecological balance. The inference can

also be that it would be acceptable to tip the environmental balance or integrity of such a wetland, which could lead to damage and pollution.

The case of Deepor Beel

The issue of wetlands being multiple-use areas – and subsequently being abused due to clashes of interest – found centre-stage this year with the observations of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in the case of Deepor Beel.

Deepor Beel is a Ramsar site and a part of it is also wildlife sanctuary in Guwahati, Assam. ('Ramsar Sites are designated because they meet the criteria for identifying wetlands of international importance.') This wetland harbours a wide variety of biodiversity, and also suffers from intense man-made pressure – the city's municipal waste is dumped close to the Beel. Large, meat-eating storks (Greater adjutant storks) are ironically found eating from the mountains of garbage at the site. Potential impacts of contamination or poisoning from the garbage are still unknown. This January, 26 storks died. The fact that Deepor Beel (Beel means water body) exists as a wetland does not prevent garbage dumping; this is a fate faced by many wetlands. The NGT's observations on Deepor Beel are interesting and sympto-

matic of what is happening in several wetlands. In an inspection done by the judicial member of the Tribunal, it was noted that waste was being dumped "not beyond the site but within it," and "demarcations are made by drying out areas or cutting off water sources". These are classic ways of killing a wetland and turning it from a wet to a dry ecosystem; or from a lake to a garbage dump or cesspool. The Tribunal has now asked for the "traditional" spread of the wetland.

Given all the modern uses of wetlands, or the use of the wetland only for its land, looking at traditional cartography may be one way to understand catchments of wetlands. It may also be a way of restoring some modicum of ecological character, identity or 'rights' to wetlands, as the river judgment suggested. There are challenges ahead in identifying wetlands – multiple and competing use is just one of them. Understanding the historic spread and ecological character will be an important bulwark for the way forward. Setting clear governance systems would be the next. Without either, we are looking at a complete dilution of wetlands in the country.

Neha Sinha is a wildlife conservationist