

## Himachal gets central government nod for dam to give Delhi water

The central government has allowed Himachal Pradesh to begin building a multi-billion rupee hydroelectric project that will provide drinking water to Delhi, an official here said Saturday.

'The Environment Appraisal Committee of the Ministry of Environment and Forests has allowed the state government to start the dam construction,' Tarun Kapoor, director of the Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd (HPPCL), told IANS.

The Rs.27 billion (Rs.2,700 crore or \$561 million) Renuka dam, to be built on a tributary of the Yamuna in Sirmour district, will not only quench the thirst of the people in the national capital by providing 23 cubic metres of water per second but also generate 40 MW of electricity for the hill state.

'With the central government's permission, the construction of dam would accelerate and it's likely to be completed within six years,' Kapoor said.

The Delhi Jal Board has given Rs.3 billion (Rs.300 crore) to Himachal Pradesh for starting the land acquisition work for the project.

As per an agreement between Himachal Pradesh and New Delhi, the hill state will bear the cost of installing the electrical and mechanical equipment, including turbine generators, while Delhi will pay for the rest of the project.

Water from the 148-metre high and 430-metre wide dam will be released into the Yamuna river, from where it will reach Haryana's Hathni Kund barrage and finally reaches Delhi.

The Renuka dam project, named the Lord Parshuram Sagar project, has already been facing protests with affected families rejecting the compensation being offered in lieu of their land that will be submerged by the reservoir.

Under the banner of Renuka Bandh Jan Sangharsh Samiti, more than 1,500 residents of over a dozen villages have launched an agitation in the area. They claim the government did not take them into confidence before starting the land acquisition process.

However, Kapoor said all affected villagers would be suitably compensated and the land acquisition process would begin after taking permission from them.

'Every family who owns irrigated cultivable land will get compensation between Rs.50,000 and Rs.250,000 per bigha (0.05 acre). The average rates assessed for the compensation is Rs.10,000 to Rs.15,000 per bigha for barren land; and Rs.150,000 per bigha for cultivable land,' he said.

According to the government's relief and rehabilitation plan, every affected family will get 100 units of electricity free of cost for a period of 10 years starting from the date of commissioning of the project.

Meanwhile, the Himalayan Niti Abhiyan, a conglomerate of NGOs fighting for the cause of those facing rehabilitation due to development activities, has joined hands with the affected families. It

questioned the need for constructing such a huge dam.

'We demand to know the need for setting up a dam as water needs of Delhi could be met by a smaller structure on the pattern of a run-of-the-river project. This project does not require reservoir and a large rehabilitation,' Manshi Asher, an activist of the Himalayan Niti Abhiyan, said.

She said 1,630 hectares had been proposed to be acquired for the project, of which 60 percent is private land.

As per an agreement signed in 1994, while Delhi will get water from the Renuka dam till the Kishau and Lakhawar-Vyasi dams in neighbouring Uttarakhand become operational, Himachal Pradesh will have the right to the power generated through the project.

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