

Don't start building Tipaimukh dam before our visit: Dhaka

Asking India not to start work on the Tipaimukh dam project, Dhaka said it was sending a team of lawmakers and experts next month to visit the site before taking up the contentious issue with New Delhi.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni made the announcement even as pressure mounted against the Sheikh Hasina government to take 'political measures' against India to stop building the Tipaimukh dam on Barak river in Manipur state.

Moni told media Wednesday that she had requested Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Preneet Kaur that India should not undertake work till the study team visits the site.

The government would do 'whatever is in national interest', she said.

'Our ties with India are very significant and we will maintain the relations, upholding our national interest,' she said in reply to a question on India's plan to build the dam at Tipaimukh for power generation.

'It is not the question of hate or love. National interest is what is crucial,' New Age quoted her as saying.

'If the...Tipaimukh dam go(es) against the interest of Bangladesh, we will do whatever is needed to protect our interests,' she said.

Moni said Bangladesh had demanded a meeting of the Joint Rivers Commission, which was formed to discuss water issues between Bangladesh and India. 'We will raise the issue at the next JRC meeting,' she said.

To a query, Moni said her office had received communications on the project from [New Delhi](#) which the foreign ministry sent to the water resources ministry and the parliamentary standing committee on water resources ministry for analysis.

Environmentalists in Bangladesh say the project will reduce water flow on the Barak river downstream.

They were recently joined by protesters from Manipur who emphasised that damage to the environment would be on both sides of the border.

Barak flows into Bangladesh and joins the Meghna river.

Facing a volley of questions about a remark made last month by Indian High Commissioner Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, the minister said her 'personal view' was that the diplomat 'may have' departed from 'diplomatic norms'.

She had been present at the seminar where the envoy had called environmentalists opposing the dam project as 'so-called experts'.

'I don't think it is prudent on the part of a foreign minister to respond to comments of a diplomat. Such matters should be handled through proper diplomatic channel,' the minister said.

She said her ministry would take necessary action against the high commissioner if he had indeed breached diplomatic norms by his comments.

The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) June 23 demanded immediate 'withdrawal' of Chakravarty, accusing him of 'meddling into Bangladesh's internal affairs'.

The Hasina Government is in a blame-game with the BNP on this issue.

'Their (BNP's) policy is to please India when in power and protest against India when in the opposition,' said State Minister for Foreign Affairs Hassan Mahmood.

Industries Minister Dilip Barua told a seminar Wednesday: 'Tipaimukh will cause environmental disaster not only to Bangladesh but also the north-eastern states of India.'

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