

RIVER LINK NEWS**HOW OPPOSITION IS MOUNTING****Experts in Nepal Question River Link Plans**

Nepalese water resource experts and the civil society have demanded that Nepal spell out its vision on 'regional grid, energy trading and rights of upper riparian state'. Surya Nath Upadhyay, Chief of the Commission for Investigation of the Abuse of Authority, says sharing of water should be dealt with a broad vision for economic development. He says, "we should be clear about our rights as an upper riparian sovereign country". India is introducing the River Linking mega project to overcome the problem of water scarcity. If India links the rivers, obviously it will use Nepal's big rivers such as the Mahakali, Karnali, Koshi and Gandaki and cause massive floods during the monsoon in the lowlands in Nepal, say experts. "What will Nepal, as an upper riparian country, do if India constructs big canals out of Nepalese rivers?" questions Dr. Janak L. Karmacharya. (THE RISING NEPAL 200103)

Supreme Court helping hand for Centre? In recent months, the Supreme Court has given the Vajpayee govt more than a helping hand to get around vexed inter state water problems, be it the construction of the Sutlej-Yamuna link canal, the sharing of Cauvery waters between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, or raising the height of the SSP, or the 'suggestion' on the river linking issue. Yet, no consensus could be reached between the states involved. Not just that, they have openly flouted the Court's directive and the Centre's cajoling. (THE HINDU 020203)

Bengal says NO The W Bengal Irrigation minister has written to Union Water Resources Minister, protesting the networking of rivers as it will pose a potential threat to the state. He has written that W Bengal will be affected by floods if Brahmaputra and Ganga are linked. He has written that W Bengal being at the tail end of the Ganga basin, it is a deficit state during January to May. (THE STATESMAN 230103)

Karnataka Skeptical The state Minister for Water Resources is doubtful if the centre can implement the river link plans. He said, "There were many small rivers in the region which could be linked to benefit the States, but the attitude of the Centre indicated that it did not have the political will to do so". He said many had doubts about the practical problems in implementing such a huge project, particularly in view of the destruction of forests and migration of people. Recalling the success stories of Tarun Bharat Sangh, he said water scarcity could be tackled by harvesting rainwater and adopting other conservation measures. He urged the Prime Minister to amend the constitution to make rainwater harvesting and water conservation a fundamental duty. (THE HINDU 010503)

Linking river will destroy gene pools The proposal of linking rivers will not help in controlling flood and drought, it would rather destroy gene pool of different rivers, said Rajendra Singh. Giving examples of Yamuna-Sutlej interlinking project, Singh asked what have we gained except disputes between states. (THE ASIAN AGE 130303)

Connecting Rivers, Disconnecting Lives Wherever large canals are built for inter-basin transfers, irrigation colonies will spring up and reservoirs will drown biodiversity. If the proposal to link rivers ever sees the light of the day, the first effects will undoubtedly be felt by the tigers of the Satpuras and the same fate will befall the elephants of the Eastern and Western ghats. Scores of other species, including the Great Indian Bustard and uncounted number of lesser life form would perish. In past projects of much smaller proportion, such as Indira Gandhi canal and Chilla canal has adversely affected grasslands and crucial wildlife and human habitats. The need of the hour is to respect natural drainages, regenerate forests, undertake soil and moisture conservation programmes on decentralised basis and restoring traditional water harvesting systems. Whilst the scrutiny of state's past record in spending on this front and commitment in budgetary allocation doesn't inspire confidence that they are willing to undertake the much needed mission, the absurd full of sound and fury that have been embraced amounts to declaring war against lives. (SANCTURY ASIA Feb 03)

Prof Vaidyanathan raises several questions A closer examination of linking rivers idea raises several questions: First, it is based on the presumption that there are large surplus flows in some basins and that the physical transfer is feasible in terms of physical engineering, and can be accomplished economically without creating any adverse impact. On what basis and who determines the surplus basins and magnitude of surplus. Estimates of surplus made by central agencies such as national Water Development Agency are hotly contested by the States. A more serious difficulty arises from the fact that most of the flow in practically all rivers occurs during the South-West monsoon. For instance, over 80% of the annual flow in Kosi river is between may and November and almost three-fourths between June and October. Moreover, since the surplus occurs in the rainy season and the demand is in the dry season, it is not enough to merely transport (carry) the water from one point to another. And if along with Linking rivers, there is a push for building large storages, we would need to know the quantum of water to be stored, and the likely impact on habitat and environment.

All we have been offered are some maps published in the media, purportedly from the Hashim report. The

maps and the sketchy accounts in the media and official pronouncements tell us little on these aspects. Taking this maps into account, what gets reflected is that instead of surplus flows flowing to bay of Bengal via the Ganges and Brahmaputra and the Mahanadi, they will flow to the sea through the Krishna, the Godavari, whatever!

There are also good reasons to be skeptical about the state of preparation on the interlinking projects. A mega projects of such complexity calls for preparatory work of far greater dimension. Regrettably, apart from a few sketch, very little information on the specific schemes, details of their design, environment impact assessment, displacement and likely Cost-Benefit Assessment is available in the public domain. Even in case of the report of the Hashim Commission, the annexure to the report, in which the details have reportedly been discussed, are considered secret. (THE HINDU 26 & 270303)

Opposition in Assam The Asom Gana Parishad and other parties have opposed the central Govt's plan to link the Brahmaputra with other rivers in the west of the country on the grounds that its focus is not to solve the flood problem and it would deprive people of the state of water. The Asam Jatiyatibadi Yuba Chatra Parishad has also threatened to launch massive agitation if the centre executes the interlinking plan. (The Ecologist Asia, Jan-March 2003)

River linking criticised by scholars Dr Manik Kar while presenting his paper *Floods and disastrous effect of earthquake in North East India: a case study of the Brahmaputra Valley* maintained that linking of river basin to another river basin would not be possible due to high terrain in the region. He also predicted that the project if implemented would bring dangerous consequence in future management of flood. (ASSAM TRIBUNE 100303)

TN Case TN CM has stated that the NWDA had already completed necessary investigations for the diversion of west-flowing Pamba-Achankoil rivers (22 tmcft) linking Vaipparu in the East to help the drought-prone areas in Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli districts. Pointing out that the NWDA has assessed the deficit at the Grand Anaicut on Cauvery as about 250 tmcft, she said that by interlinking of rivers, it was necessary that the requisite augmentation at the anaicut was so planned as to meet the requirement of the Cauvery delta area which was the granary of TN. (Newstodaynet.com 170403)

Linking Rivers have serious consequences: WWF World Wildlife Fund DG has warned that linking rivers like pipelines without looking at the ecological impact could lead to serious repercussions. A river is more than just water; there is a lot of bio diversity in it for it sustains the livelihood of all species living in and around it. (THE HINDUSTAN TIMES 100203)

PM Speak While launching Haryali watershed programme, Prime Minister said that smaller rivers would be linked first whose water was going into the sea. *Only those rivers, which can be linked, would be linked.* The bigger rivers would be taken up later. (THE HINDU 280103)

Prabhu speak At a CII Round table on interlinking rivers, Task Force Chair Suresh Prabhu said private participation would be sought for the project. He also did not rule out participation of international funding agencies. (THE ECONOMIC TIMES 120203)

Task Force News Sub-Groups for preliminary studies The first meeting of the Task Force on River Linking appointed five sub-groups to study the economic viability, social issues, ecology, engineering and international dimensions. IIM (Ahmedabad) will be an advisor of the task force on organizational structure to implement the project. The Task Force has submitted first report on April 30, 2003, but the report is not in public domain. (THE HINDU 070103)

SC Order on May 5, 2003 Pursuant to order dated 20th Jan, 2003, an affidavit dated 5th May, 2003 has been filed by Mr. BP Pandey, Deputy Commissioner, Ministry of Water Resources, Govt of India, annexing thereto the resolution dated 13.12.2002. It seems that in last about four months three meetings of Task Force have been held on 6th Jan, 2003, 27th March, 2003 and 28th April, 2003. In the last meeting the first Action Plan as per Govt Resolution was considered and adopted. Now as per Action Plan-I the schedule for implementation is 10 years from the start. It stipulates that the work on the links can be started from 2007. It is envisaged to be completed by say end of 2016. Further it envisages that the group of Task Force of interlinking rivers will examine the two schedules and is expected to arrive at a reasonable and predicable implementation schedule in due course. According to Action Plan -I the said Task Force has laid emphasis on demonstrative value of starting work on a link or two, as soon as possible. The process of preparation of Detailed Project Report for an inter basin link need to cover also, Detailed EIA, EMP and R&R Plan for project affection persons. We find no substance in the apprehension that the Task Force will not implement the law. We have also no doubt that in case the other experts in the field provide necessary inputs to the Task Force, it will give it due consideration the same deserves. For the present, we would direct posting of the matter after six months.