

NOTE

Reviewing 'Loharinagpala' Hydro Project

B J writes :

Union Government has reportedly cancelled Loharinagpala hydro electric scheme on Bhagirathi River in Uttarakhand in view of the faith of the people towards River Ganga. This line of argument, however, assumes that there exists a conflict between body and soul. Such is not the case.

The project was originally mooted by the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC)—a public sector undertaking under the Union Ministry of Power (MoP). And MoP continues to harbour the illusion of going great projecting cheap electricity from the project though the reality is otherwise.

Loharinagpala hydro project is not beneficial for the body or the soul by any standard. Yet Ministry of Power wants to build it. A section of local people is also in favour of the project. Reason is that the project is beneficial for these groups even though it is harmful for the country and the people.

NTPC will actually sell the electricity at a higher price than Rs 1.78 per unit declared in the documents. This low price is shown in the documents to hoodwink the Central Electricity Authority and Ministry of Environment into believing that the project is beneficial. The project becomes beneficial for NTPC at the higher price. But at the same time, higher price means lower benefit for the consumers. Second player is Ministry of Power. It is interested in promoting this project because NTPC provides unspecified benefits to the powers that be. Third player is the State Government of Uttarakhand. It is interested in getting 12 percent free power. This revenue will be used to pay higher salaries and perks to its employees and making available more money for giving out contracts. Last supporter of the project is a section of the local people consisting mostly of contractors of NTPC. Some ply taxis for NTPC; others get petty contracts for construction etc. They do not understand that the loss of agriculture, sand and fish will occur in perpetuity while the taxis will ply in NTPC offices for merely 5 years during construction. The British Government had similarly lured some countrymen, mostly peasants into joining the police forces by giving attraction of employment. These people sprayed bullets on the freedom fighters. Similarly, the Union and State Governments are luring local people into supporting the Loharinagpala project that will actually deprive them of their livelihoods. Proof lies in Chain village of Vishnu Prayag hydroelectric project on River Alaknanda. Those who once supported the project have lost their houses due to landslides and lost their agriculture due to drying of water sources. They are living like fish out of water.

Loharinagpala and most other hydropower projects are not for the benefit of the economy or the people. But economist Prime Minister is so captivated by the power contractors that he refuses to get a true assessment of benefits and costs of these entirely harmful projects. □□□