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Experts cry foul at promoters' claims

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Mangalore: Are frogs and jungle fowls animals? Can cattle leaches, rats and butterflies be classified as reptiles?

This is the classification under which the Comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment (CEIA), prepared by the Institute for Catchment Studies and Environmental Management (ICSEM), Bangalore, for Gundia Hydro Electric Project (GHEP), lists them under!

Conservationists who have filed objections to the CEIA report prepared by promoters of the GHEP, proposed in the catchment zone of the Nethravati, want the application for environmental clearance by the project proponents to be rejected as the report contains false and misleading data. The CEIA is prepared for 1x200 MW phase I of the project.

Niren Jain, coordinator, Kudremukh Wildlife Foundation (KWF), says the environmental consultants, who undertook the study do not even have the basic idea of zoological taxonomy. "Hence the CEIA should be declared as false on this ground alone, he asserts.

The KWF has already filed objections with DK deputy commissioner, who is also the presiding officer for the public hearing of CEIA for GHEP. A letter addressed to the DC states the CEIA has intentionally and wrongly reported the project area is at a distance of 30km from Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary (PWS). "The GHEP is located within 9.5 km of PWS upon actual measurement on the topographic map of Survey of India. So it's within the Ecologically Sensitive Zone as per the Environment (Protection) Act. Hence, the execution of this mega project will be in violation of the order of the ministry of environment and forests (MoEF) restricting any such large scale activities within the ecologically sensitive zone, Jain points out.

The GHEP falls in Category `A' projects (more than 50 MW hydroelectric power generation) for which `scoping' should be made by the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), who should determine the Terms of Reference (TOR) addressing all relevant environmental concerns for the preparation of an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), as per the MoEF notification. "No such 'scoping' or detailed `TOR' by the EAC was made or enclosed for/in the CEIA. The EIA becomes null and void on this ground alone, Jain points out.

Quoting the MoEF's notification which states `deliberate concealment and/or submission of false data which is material to screening or scoping shall make the application liable for rejection,' Jain has urged the DC to reject the application for environmental clearance as the CEIA contains completely false and misleading information and data.

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