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Committee to advise government on saving Western Ghats ecology
Scientific panel to examine Gundia hydrel project

New Delhi, July 13, DHNS

The Gundia hydro-power project may not get a quick final approval from the Centre even after cutting down half of its land requirement.

The controversial project will now be examined by a scientific panel which is tasked to advise the government on how to conserve the ecology of the Western Ghats. On June 30, the environment appraisal committee (EAC) of the Union Environment and Forest Ministry had cleared the Gundia project after the State dropped its biggest storage dam, Hongadahalla, from the project, reducing the land requirement by more than 50 per cent. Karnataka Power Corporation officials admitted that dropping the storage dam will limit the 400-MW power plant's operation only to four months.

The EAC, however, asked the ministry to consider the recommendations of the Madhav Gadgil committee before granting the approval. The Gadgil panel was formed a few months ago to suggest to the government on how to strike a balance between maintaining the ecology of the biodiversity-rich Western Ghats and the region's developmental needs.

Officials on Tuesday stated that the Gundia project had been referred to the Gadgil panel that will look at development and environmental issues in the context of "ecologically-significant, biodiversity-rich and environmentally-significant Western Ghats region".

"We plan to visit some projects in the Western Ghats in the future. Gundia could be one of them. We have not looked into the Gundia case so far," Gadgil, a former professor at the IISc, Bangalore, told Deccan Herald from his residence in Pune. The ministry would take a final view on once the panel submits its report.

A sub-committee of the EAC visited the contentious site thrice since 2008, and finally gave the approval on June 30.

The nod came after the EAC was convinced with the KPCL's plan of dropping the Hongadahalla dam, which will reduce the land requirement by more than 50 per cent.

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