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'Jairam's volte-face halts power projects'

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BANGALORE: The energy minister, K S Eshwarappa, on Tuesday lashed out at Union minister [Jairam Ramesh](#) for his volte-face.

Ramesh, currently the environment and forests minister, had encouraged the state to set up some key power projects, including the environmentally-sensitive Tadadi and Gundia projects, when he was the Union power minister in the previous UPA government. "Now, he is objecting to the same projects he encouraged last year," Eshwarappa told reporters here on Tuesday.

Ramesh is said to have been positive about the state carrying on Yermarasu and Yedlapura power projects in the Krishna basin and Mokedatu, Rasimalla and Shivanasamudra projects in the Cauvery basin. But Eshwarappa said that, barring the Shivanasamudra project, Ramesh is now opposing all others as the government fears that large tracts of forest cover will be lost.

Eshwarappa said the state has no idea how to take forward the Mokedatu project as over 10,000 hectares of forest cover will be lost. He also said no talks were held between Karnataka and TN governments on setting up power projects in the Cauvery basin. The state was keen only on augmenting power generation at Shivanasamudra.

Central team for Gundia

The Centre agreed to send an expert committee to assess feasibility of setting up a 270 MW hydropower unit at Gundia in Sakleshpur, Hassan. A study is being conducted in the Malnad region to estimate the loss of forest cover to this project. The Centre will provide environmental clearances only after studying the report, Eshwarappa said. Malnad Janapara Horata Samithi has been opposing the project.

Power scenario

The state has been facing a power shortage on account of increased demand from all sectors. Eshwarappa said there was no question of purchasing power from private parties. The demand has been fluctuating between 89 million units to 101 million units per day. The government is confident of adding 5,000 MW to the state grid at the end of its five-year tenure, he said.

Judicial probe

The government ordered a judicial inquiry into coal imports for the Raichur Thermal Power Station and purchase of transformers over six years, commencing from 2003.

Justice Mohan Kumar, retired judge of the Karnataka High Court, will conduct the probe and has been asked to submit the report in six months. During the last assembly session, Yeddyurappa announced that a retired high court judge would conduct a probe into coal purchases and transportation of indigenously mined coal from some mines in Orissa and Jharkhand.

Hike in power tariff?

Sources in the [energy department](#) said power tariff may be hiked by 30 paise per unit. The department has submitted a proposal to the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Authority (KERC) to increase the tariff by 51 paise. But KERC told the government to bring down transmission and distribution losses to 15% from the current 22%. KERC also told the government to modernize equipment.

Sudhakar Rao to head KERC?

Former chief secretary Sudhakar Rao is likely to head KERC after K P Pande retires on December 12. The other contender seems to be additional CS, head of finance department, M R Sreenivas Murthy.

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