



Etalin Hydro Power Project

For Prelims: Etalin hydro power project, Dibang valley, Forest Advisory committee

For Mains: Preference to Growth and development, Growth and development over environment

Why in news?

Wildlife scientists and conservationists in **Arunachal Pradesh** flagged threats to local biodiversity from the proposed Etalin hydroelectric (3,097 MW) project in **Dibang Valley**. To raise the issue, they approached the [Forest Advisory Committee \(FAC\)](#) under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC).

- [WildLife Institute of India \(WII\)](#) and the [National Tiger Conservation Authority \(NTCA\)](#) have suggested taking cognizance of certain safeguards and mitigation measures while considering project approval.
- FAC ordered the formation of a **four-member committee** to address apprehensions concerning wildlife as well as endemic flora and fauna of the area in a holistic manner.

What is the Significance of Dibang River?

- The Project is based on the **river Dibang** and is proposed to be completed in 7 years.
 - **Dibang is a tributary of the Brahmaputra River** which flows through the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.
- It envisages construction of two dams over the tributaries of Dibang: **Dir and Tangon**.
- The Project falls under the richest **bio-geographical province of the Himalayan zone** and would be located at the junction of major biogeographic zones like Palearctic Zone and Indo-Malayan Zone.
- It is expected to be **one of the biggest hydropower projects** in India in terms of installed capacity.

What are the Concerns Raised by the Environmentalists?

- Conservationists highlighted that the FAC sub-committee **ignored established tenets of forest conservation and related legal issues** while recommending the proposal.
- FAC **ignored the threat of forest fragmentation**.
 - **Forest fragmentation** results from ill-planned intrusion of developmental projects into contiguous landscapes with natural forests and threatens rare floral and faunal species in a biodiversity hotspot.
- FAC's **site inspection report was also questioned for leaving out key details** like number of grids across an altitudinal range inspected and the status of vegetation there, direct and indirect signs of wild animals listed in the various **schedules of the [Wildlife Protection Act, 1972](#)** and overall appreciation of the ecological value of the area.
- The **inadequacy of the [Environment Impact Assessment](#) report** on Etalin was also highlighted.
 - Wildlife officials ignored observations which include the threat to 25 globally endangered

mammal and bird species in the area to be affected.

- The proposed **mitigation measures** like setting up butterfly and reptile parks are **inadequate and insufficient**.

What is the Forest Advisory Committee?

- It is a statutory body which was constituted by the **Forest (Conservation) Act 1980**.
- It comes under the Ministry of Environment, Forests & Climate Change (MoEF&CC).
- It considers questions on the diversion of forest land for non-forest uses such as mining, industrial projects, townships and advises the government on the issue of granting forest clearances. However, its role is advisory.

Way Forward

- **Community-led approach:** The local population of the region should be consulted and should have participation in the decision making to ensure that the final decision making should reflect their concerns.
- **Demarcation of ecological sensitive areas:** The areas which are at risk of loss of biodiversity should be properly delineated to ensure that they remain undisturbed.
- **Environment Impact assessment (EIA):** A proper and complete assessment of the impact of the project on the local environment should be studied comprehensively.
- **Extension of Protected Areas:** The greater number of national parks and sanctuaries should be established to protect the endangered animals and plants.

[Source:DTE](#)

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