

ENERGY/WATER

Leaping into fray over 'Nimoo Bazgo' hydro project

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Pakistan refuses to change the perception that India leaves no opportunity to hijack the waters of Indus. The lower riparian sensitivity is turning more into a 'syndrome' leading to construction of 'false sense of scarcity'. The Nimoo Bazgo hydropower plant under construction in the Leh district in Kashmir has been surrounded by controversies similar to Baglihar and Chutak hydropower projects.

At the time where the glitches were removed for the projects earlier under contestation, another round of the controversies questioned the Indus Waters Treaty. Although in the media, it may seem like IWT can never see the end to such conflicts, the water commissions on both the sides have shown immense maturity to try and peacefully solve the issue in hand. Technically, the reasons raised over the pondage level and silt flushing outlet stands a logical reasoning. However, the media remains unsatisfied with the 'positive' meeting of the Indus Water Commissioners last year and instead is relying heavily on unqualified sources. One of the recent articles in Pakistani newspaper actually lists the number of hydropower projects India plans to build in Jammu and Kashmir. According to the Planning Commission, Central Water Commissions and Central Electricity Authority reports and resources, none of the listed dams have been commissioned, under-construction or even under investigation. Had there been a single point chance of dam getting constructed of the mentioned magnitude and behemoth engineering, it would have gathered attention and response from government, NGOs and other related bodies at a lot higher level, if not anything else.

Notwithstanding the concerns that Pakistan is raising, it is imperative for a country which is vitally dependent on one river system to be a bit belligerent on such issues, especially given the long drawn history of the two countries. Interestingly, adding fuel to the fire are the internal uncertainties going in Pakistan's Indus Water Commission. With the former water commissioner, Mr. Sayeed Jammat Ali Shah, being investigated for having favoured India on the Nimoo Bazgo project, the whole dynamics of this probe has changed its position as compared to the other two

hydro projects which were under contestation. This unfortunate allegation has snowballed the issue into a stand-off between India and Pakistan and within Pakistan, bringing the separation of technicalities and politics one degree farther. Furthermore, delay by the Pakistani's IWC in approaching International Court of Arbitration for the Nimoo Bazgo project due to incomplete paper-work has further added to the worries and fears of Pakistan especially after losing the Baglihar and Kishanganga Hydropower project cases. To assume that this issue will be legally resolved without any conspiracy theories being circulated would be too naïve. Learning from the past and being the responsible upper riparian, India should try to balance the rambunctious behaviour of the neighbour by facilitating the sharing of data and information on the dam and keep the communication channels open and transparent.

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