

Floods in Sitamarhi and Muzaffarpur, Bihar

- Dinesh Kumar Mishra

The secretary of WRD has already passed on the responsibility of recent Bagmati floods on the railways which is building a bridge near Runni Saidpur. It is necessary to say this because Mahesh Prasad Singh, Minister of Irrigation of Bihar had charged railways of causing floods in Kamla Basin under similar circumstances way back in 1965. The Railway Minister then at the Center was Dr Ram Subhag Singh, who hailed from Bihar. The entire episode makes very interesting reading. History is repeating itself after a long gap and this is the time for the present Railway Minister to step in. It will be more entertaining now because different coalitions are ruling at Patna and Delhi. In 1965, it was Congress at both the places.

The proposed dams in Nepal are in news again and the discussions over the issue is stale. Jagadanand, then Water Resource Minister of Bihar, asserted in Bihar Vidhan Sabha (22nd July 2002), '*...Sir, the last point, no discharge control-no flood control. Unless the discharge is controlled, the scientists all over the world are convinced that the floods cannot be controlled...Embankments do not control the discharge, they can, at best, prevent water from spreading. Weak embankments cannot hold uncontrolled discharge and the flood will continue to bother us as a natural calamity. If we want to control floods in this state, we will have to control discharge in the upper riparian states and the neighboring countries. We have had negotiations with them and have unanimously agreed that to proceed jointly.*'

In reply to a call attention motion of Ram Vilas Paswan regarding floods in Bihar, Arjun Charan Sethi, Minister of Water Resources at the Center told the Lok Sabha, on the 22nd August 2003, '*...So far as Bihar is concerned, we are having constant interaction with the Government of Nepal because we all know these rivers originate from Nepal. Unless we have any kind of agreement with Nepal, this problem cannot be solved. The proposal for setting up of the Joint Project Office in Nepal for taking up field investigations and preparation of Detailed Project Report has since been approved. 100 officials from Nepal, and 42 officials from India are to carry out field investigations and studies. The project will inter alia have 269 meters high dam with an installed capacity of 3,300 MW and irrigation benefits accruing both to India and Nepal. In addition to Kosi Multipurpose Project, it will include Sun Kosi Diversion scheme as well.*'

Similar statement was made by Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Central Minister of Water Resources, made a statement in Kishanganj on the 5th June in 2004. Jay Prakash Narayan Yadav, State Minister of Water Resources at the Center on the 24th June 2004, while talking to the press in New Delhi said that a sum of Rs. 29 Crores has been sanctioned for the construction of the Kosi High Dam (He must have meant that it was for the preparation of the DPR). As far as Barakhshetra Dam is concerned, the politicians in India are sticking to the same statement that dialogue with Nepal is on and on this is since 1947. Jay Prakash Narayan Yadav reiterated his statement again in 2005. The joint team is working in Nepal for the preparation of the DPR but its personnel are tight lipped over what they are going to propose and when.

The ghost of the Barakhshetra Dam haunts the planners, engineers and the politicians ever since the embanking plans of the Kosi was rejected in favor of a large dam by the Central Government in 1946 and the statements like the one given by Jagadanand, Arjun Charan Sethi, Das Munshi or Jay Prakash Narayan Yadav are a matter of routine in the flood season.

The annual report of Water Resources Department of Bihar (2006-07) has already completed the formality of suggesting that the solution to the flood problems of Bihar lies in building dams in Nepal and wants the Center to expedite the negotiations. These negotiations are, however, going on for the past 60 years.

The factual position about these dams is that they are no way linked to flood control and the flood victims of North Bihar have been systematically fooled over years and they will suffer indefinitely at the hands of the politicians, engineers and the vested interests that are dangling carrots of these dams for decades. Here is the reason, why.

There are three dams that often come as proposal to solve north Bihar problems. These are the Chisapani on the Kamla, the Nunthore dam on the Bagmati and the Barakhshetra on the Kosi. The Report of the Second Irrigation Commission of Bihar (1994) spells very clearly that there is no flood cushion provided in the proposed Chisapani Reservoir on the Kamla. (Vol. V, Part -1, p-511). A Report of the Expert Committee to study impact of interlinking of river on Bihar (April 2005, Chapter III, p-16) says, '...But the proposed Sapta Kosi Dam too has not been provided with any flood cushion which should be provided for flood moderation...' Regarding the proposed Nunthore Dam on the Bagmati, the Second Bihar Irrigation Commission Report says, '...it appears clearly that even after the construction of dam at Nunthore, there would be no appreciable flood moderation in the middle and lower reaches of the Bagmati and obviously further supplementary floods managements measures would be needed' (Vol. V Part-1, p-414). A recent report of WRD of GoB (May 2006) observes that '...but none of these schemes could come up as yet, and in near future also there is little hope of execution of these schemes (Chapter-V, p-1).' Thus, there is neither any flood cushion provided in the design of the proposed dams nor there is any likelihood of the dams being built in near future.

Inaugurating a seminar organized by the Water Resource Development Centre of Patna University on the 2nd March 2002, the Water Resource Secretary of the GoB said that, given the resources available with the Government, there was no possibility of a dam being built on the Kosi at Barakhshetra in the coming 50-60 years. This seminar was discussing the flood problem of the state and was attended by all the 'Who is who' of the technical fraternity of the state that included the many Chief Engineers of the Water Resources Department of Bihar. If that be so, the question is whether there is any interim plan to face the floods if the construction of the proposed dams in Nepal is not likely to be started in coming 50-60 years and even if it does, it will take another 15-20 years to complete the same so that the benefits of flood control could be tapped. The answer is-no.

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