

# Sword over 78 lac trees for Tipaimukh dam

Source: **The Sangai Express**

**Guwahati, January 20, 2012::** Seventy-eight lakh trees will be chopped as part of the forest clearance process for the 1,500MW Tipaimukh hydroelectric project in Manipur, an exercise that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh says will be taken up for "national interest". The project, which has been in the eye of controversies following opposition from Bangladesh, has received support from the Centre, which has promised not to take any steps that would adversely affect the neighbouring country. The project near the Manipur-Mizoram border, 500 metres downstream of the confluence of river Barak and the Tuivai in Churachandpur district of Manipur, received environmental clearance in 2008. Alarmed by the diversion of a very large area of forest land and felling of more than 78 lakh trees, the forest advisory committee, under the ministry of environment and forests, has recommended that a sub-committee, along with domain experts in the field of ecology, wildlife, hydrology and others, visit the project site to make an on-the-spot assessment of impacts. The committee, which met on January 11-12 in New Delhi, also recommended that the sub-committee may suggest appropriate measures on further reduction in dam height to minimise forest land requirement. The committee said the forest land proposed for diversion contains 78,16,931 trees and 27,000 bamboo columns. Principal chief conservator of forests, Manipur, has been quoted in the report as saying "no compensatory measure would help in mitigating the loss caused by felling of such large number of trees as also the diverse impact on the habitat, flora, fauna, bio-diversity and environment, unless additional non-forest areas in affected districts or adjoining districts are taken up for compensatory afforestation". The per megawatt requirement of forest land at 16.22 hectares is also substantially high, the committee said. Manipur had initially submitted a proposal to obtain approval of the Centre under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, for diversion of 20,464 hectares of forest land, which was later revised to 25,822.14 hectares. Later, according to the consideration of recommendations made by the northeastern regional office of the ministry of environment and forests, the area of forest land proposed for diversion was further revised to 22,777.50 hectares. Mizoram also sent a proposal for diversion of 1551.60 hectares of forest land, which is being processed separately. The total diversion is 24,329 hectares of forest land, of which 22,777.50 hectares is in Manipur and 1551.60 hectares is in Mizoram. The project is being executed as a joint venture of the NHPC (69 per cent), Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam Limited (26 per cent) and the Manipur Govt (5 per cent). It was initially proposed to be executed by the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited. The Tipaimukh project is expected to take 87 months for completion and will come up during the 12th Five Year Plan. The total cost of the project is estimated at Rs 9,211 crore at September 2008 price level. Many project proponents, including government departments have been urging the Centre to expedite the process of granting environment and forest clearances as otherwise the projects were getting delayed. Though the environmental clearance given in 2008 had said downstream impacts of the project in Assam should be studied because of construction of the dam, sources said nothing had been done till now. The clearance letter had also said since the Tipaimukh project involved large submergence, a comprehensive study of the possible greenhouse emissions from the project should be carried out. Sources, however, said this also had not been done. "How shall we kill ourselves in an age of climate change...let us count the ways. Instead of investing money in enhancing efficiency and making existing hydroelectric power projects deliver on failed promises, myopic planners in the Prime Minister's Office and Planning Commission are laying out a silken trap for the Indian people. ...promising power and delivering a slow death from ecological instability instead," wildlife expert Bittu Sahgal told The Telegraph. "This is going to be an ecological disaster. There is great impact in the upstream area and one can very well imagine what may happen downstream, which has still not been studied," Firoz Ahmed, wildlife conservationist from Assam, said. "This will be transformed into a desert. This is an exceptionally rich biodiverse area," RK Ranjan Singh, an environmentalist and adviser to the Manipur-based NGO Citizens' Concern for Dams and Development, said. "No project in the country, howsoever necessary, should be cleared by any authority if it involves large-scale cutting of trees. Such action is a disaster for the future of a nation and the country requires a strict land use policy urgently," Valmik Thapar, eminent wildlife conservationist, said.