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## Dam 'MoU virus' threatens Arunachal Pradesh



[Nanda Kirati Dewan](#) · 08:11, 20 Jul 2009 · 10862 views · 4 min read

community newspaper —  
**AssamTimes**

Arunachal citizens Right (ACR) have raised concern about the rapid pace at which the state government has signed Memoranda of Agreement (MoAs) with hydro-power companies in recent times. As per an RTI reply to the Arunachal Citizens' Rights (ACR) the state government has signed MoAs for 103 hydropower projects for a total of 30,000 MW since February 2006. 31 of these MoUs/MoAs were signed in just five months before the Lok Sabha polls, each accompanied by huge monetary advances. The state plans to sign a total of 135 MoAs for 57,000 MW. The former Minister of State for Power, Mr. Jairam Ramesh, had referred to this phenomenon as a 'MoU virus' in May 2008. But the state government has only speeded up the process since, while New Delhi has been rapidly granting central clearances. For example, in the last two years the Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF) has given pre-construction clearances to 33 projects and final environmental clearance to one project in the state, not rejecting even a single project! Arunachal is an ecologically and geologically fragile, seismically active and culturally sensitive state. Two out of the three global biodiversity hotspots which cover India traverse the frontier state: Himalaya and Indo-Burma. The state is home to a diversity of small populations of indigenous (tribal) communities, whose rights have been protected through constitutional and legal protection, particularly with respect to land rights and restricted entry of outside persons in the culturally sensitive indigenous territories. However, local communities' feel that the large dam juggernaut is in contradiction to these safeguards. A major concern is the influx of 4-500,000 outside workers to build 135 dams, which is likely to upset the demographic and socio-cultural fabric of the tribal state. Since these mega dams are long gestation projects, presence of such a large work force for long periods will also put a severe pressure on the rich forests of the state, huge areas of which will also be lost due to submergence. Compensatory mechanisms put in place will also involve converting large areas of Unclassified State Forests (under community control) into Protected Forests (under state control). Thus indigenous communities will see a major undermining of their rights over the entire landscape. Public consultation and green clearances have been reduced to a farcical cosmetic exercise as project developers have already paid huge advances at the time of signing agreements. Cumulative upstream and downstream impacts of so many large projects have also been ignored. The MoU virus took speed in the five months preceding the Lok Sabha polls and major private players who signed MoAs in this period include the Jindal's and Reliance. The Jindal's signed agreements for two projects totaling 4500 MW in December 2008 and paid an advance of Rs. 297.5 crores to the state government. Reliance Energy Ltd. signed agreements for four projects totaling 2520 MW in March 2009 and paid Rs. 98 crores as advance. Reliance had already signed two agreements earlier in 2006, one of which (1000 MW Siyom) was taken away from state-owned NHPC Ltd. and given to the private company. The two projects worth 4500 MW signed by Jindal were also earlier awarded to state owned NTPC, but were taken away as they could not pay upfront advances demanded by the state government. Conflicts over the dams (including in downstream areas) have exploded in the last two years. Youth asking for ecologically and socially sensitive development in the state have been at the

forefront of local movements. Activists have appealed to the citizens' of this country to intervene before the dam 'MoU virus' destroys the peaceful state. They have also appealed to the state and central governments for a moratorium on new agreements and clearances to large dams in the state.



### **Nanda Kirati Dewan**

Nanda Kumar Dewan is our Senior Journalist covering Community Development & International Relations. He is a Mass Communication & Journalism graduate from Sikkim Manipal University (SMU). He started his journalism career with UB Photos News agency in 2006 as News Photo Caption Editor and Photojournalist. He has been associated with Assam Times since it's inception and today is a part of our editorial team.

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