Panel submits report on hydro projects in HC
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SHIMLA, Hindustan Times, 11th August 2010

"The state government should not allot any more hydro electric projects in the state, or wherever allotted, they should be withheld, till the Environment Impact Assessments (EIAs) are carried out and finalised for all the river basins in Himachal Pradesh."

This was recommended by a high-powered one-man committee comprising additional chief secretary (forests) Avay Shukla in a 30-page report submitted to the Himachal Pradesh High Court. The committee was appointed by High Court itself in December last to monitor environmental compliance of hydro electric projects in Himachal.

The HC had taken note of the media reports that about 10 lakh trees had faced the axe during execution of 150 hydro projects in Himachal since 1990.

The Committee, that inspected 11 hydro projects of over 100 MW capacity each, said in its report that the individual EIAs and Environment Management Plans (EMPs) of projects do not address the larger concerns, for where environment impacts are concerned the whole damage along the river basin is bigger than the sum of its parts.

"During visit to major river basins of the state, Sutlej, Beas and Ravi, it was found that the main valleys have already been saturated with hydro projects every few km. Now, projects are being allotted in ever increasing numbers in the side valleys of tributaries," it said.

Shukla committee report pointing out that the effects of such large scale felling of trees, dumping of muck and diversion of waters over the entire river basins (not just a few isolated spots) has never been studied by the government before allotting these projects.

The Committee observed that the hydro projects are being allotted along rivers and their tributaries in a cascading manner, that is, one project after another in a series along the entire length of river. "Since these are all run of the river projects, the waters are being repeatedly diverted from the river bed into Head Race tunnels. This renders the river dry itself for huge stretches (the 15 per cent mandatory discharge is also not being followed in most cases).