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EDITORIAL 01

Power play: On hydropower projects and the environment

Hydropower projects must factor in the environmental costs too

While Wayanad in Kerala limps back to normal life after the **devastating** landslide last month, a landslide on Tuesday (August 20, 2024) in Sikkim caused damage to six houses and a building of the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) at its Teesta-5 hydropower station in Gangtok. There is no comparison of the impact of the event in both places, as there was no loss of lives or injuries reported in Sikkim. However, the cause for concern is that this is the second natural-disaster-led **assault** on a hydropower project along the Teesta. A **deluge** from the South Lhonak glacier in North Sikkim last October washed away the Chungthang dam that was critical to the Teesta-3 power station (which is not operated by the NHPC). The Teesta-3 (1,200 MW) power project was the largest hydroelectric power project in the State until it was effectively grounded after the **outburst**. Only a tenth of the power originally being supplied by the project is now available. The Teesta-5 project,



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at 510 MW, has also been made non-functional since the glacial lake outburst.

The disaster shines a new light on an old, but never **quiescent**, **conundrum** posed by hydropower projects. From initial proposals nearly three decades ago to have 47 power projects along the run of the Teesta in Sikkim and West Bengal, only five projects exist and about 16 are in various stages of consideration. A tributary of the Brahmaputra, the Teesta river originates from the Tso Lhamo Lake at an elevation of about 5,280 metres in north Sikkim. The river travels for about 150 km in Sikkim and 123 km in West Bengal, before entering Bangladesh from Mekhligunj in Cooch Behar district; it flows another 140 km in Bangladesh and joins the Bay of Bengal. In theory, the river's course through **undulating** terrain is what tempts governments to extract as much benefit as possible for power projects. Through the decades, several companies have bid for projects auctioned out by State governments but the process has rarely been without complications. It has been a complicated exercise in balancing the environmental risks, costs of properly insuring for those risks, public perception and aiming for profit. In the case of the Teesta-3 project, reports have emerged that the developers, in order to save on costs, built a concrete-faced rock fill

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dam as opposed to a concrete gravity dam — one reason why it was completely washed away. Environmental impact assessments of hydropower projects in the region must give a clear estimate of the actual costs involved. This will not only **bolster** public faith in these projects but also be environmentally sustainable.

SUMMARY

A landslide in Sikkim caused damage to six houses and a building of the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) at its Teesta-5 hydropower station in Gangtok. This is the second natural-disaster-led assault on a hydropower project along the Teesta river, which originates from the Tso Lhamo Lake. The disaster highlights the ongoing conundrum posed by hydropower projects, with only five existing and about 16 in various stages of consideration. The Teesta river's course through undulating terrain is what tempts governments to extract as much benefit as possible for power projects. Environmental impact assessments of hydropower projects in the region must give a clear estimate of the actual costs involved to bolster public faith and be environmentally sustainable.



Vocabulary

1. Devastating

Synonyms: Destructive, catastrophic, calamitous

Antonyms: Helpful, constructive, beneficial

2. Outburst

Synonyms: Explosion, eruption, blowup

Antonyms: Calmness, composure, control

3. Deluge

Synonyms: Flood, inundation, surge

Antonyms: Drought, trickle, drip

4. Assault

Synonyms: Attack, molestation, harassment

Antonyms: Defence, protection, safety

5. Quiescent

Synonyms: Dormant, inactive, quiet

Antonyms: Active, erupting, explosive

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6. Conundrum

Synonyms: Puzzle, enigma, riddle

Antonyms: Clarity, certainty, simplicity, resolution

7. Undulating

Synonyms: Wavy, curvy, sinuous

Antonyms: Flat, straight, level

8. Bolster

Synonyms: support, strengthen, reinforce

Antonyms: Drain, deplete, lessen

EDITORIAL 02

Double brake: On the contest in the Haryana

Assembly elections

Struggling with anti-incumbency, the BJP faces a resurgent Congress in Haryana

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Haryana is leaving no stone unturned to fight back a **resurgent** Congress, as the State is

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scheduled to have a single-phase Assembly election on October 1 for all 90 seats. The attempts of the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) to retain its position as a third player, and of the Aam Aadmi Party to emerge as one, continue, though a sharp **polarisation** between the two national parties appears likely. The BJP has to tackle double **anti-incumbency** as it has been in power in both the State and the Centre for the last 10 years. **Cognisant** of the headwinds, the BJP replaced then Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar with Nayab Singh Saini, in March ahead of the general election. Mr. Saini has been trying to **pacify** various interest groups, by reversing many decisions of his predecessor and announcing new schemes. Sarpanches who are up in arms over the **curtailing** of their rights have got their expenditure limit increased for the gram panchayats from ₹5 lakh to ₹21 lakh. He has organised special camps, or 'Samadhan Shivirs', to address people's grievances; and 1.20 lakh contractual employees have been ensured job security until the age of superannuation. The creamy layer annual income for Other Backward Classes, that was reduced to ₹6 lakh by Mr. Manohar Lal Khattar, has been restored to its level of ₹8 lakh. A 10% horizontal reservation for Agniveers in various State government posts, and an expanded minimum support price regime for crops have been promised.

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Haryana's fundamental social cleft between Jats and non-Jats had worked to the BJP's advantage in the last two Assembly elections. But the multi-caste alliance behind the BJP had begun to weaken by the 2019 Assembly election, with the farmers' **agitation** and the Agnipath scheme undermining it further in the last five years. Additionally, the party is caught in numerous rivalries within the tent. The party's majority in the Assembly itself is questionable. The Congress hopes to cash in on all this and turn around its own fortunes. Former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, who is **helming** the Congress campaign, appears to have **consolidated** the party behind him. His focus is on unemployment and the crisis in the agricultural sector. The Congress still has the task of ensuring that its factional leaders remain united until the end. Communal polarisation, though at its lowest in the last 10 years, can still **wreck** the party's plans. Despite a decline, the BJP managed to avoid a total **rout** in the Lok Sabha election. The Congress and the BJP shared the 10 Lok Sabha seats equally, while the Congress increased its vote share across the State. The outcome in Haryana will have implications for the Congress and the BJP at the national level.



SUMMARY

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Haryana is battling a resurgent Congress in the state, with the state set for a single-phase Assembly election on October 1. The Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) and Aam Aadmi Party are attempting to retain their positions, but a sharp polarisation between the two national parties is likely. The BJP has been in power in both the State and the Centre for the last 10 years, and has replaced then-Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar with Nayab Singh Saini. Saini has implemented new schemes, such as increased expenditure limits for gram panchayats, job security for 1.20 lakh contractual employees, and an expanded minimum support price regime for crops. However, the party's majority in the Assembly is questionable, and the Congress aims to turn around its fortunes. The outcome in Haryana will have implications for both the Congress and the BJP at the national level.

Vocabulary

1. Anti-incumbency

Meaning: It refers to a sentiment among voters against the current office holders or incumbents, often due to dissatisfaction with their performance, policies, or perceived flaws.



2. Resurgent

Synonyms: Reviving, recovering, reborn

Antonyms: Weakening, fading, stagnant

3. Polarisation

Synonyms: Division, segregation, fragmentation

Antonyms: Unity, consensus, cooperation

4. Pacify

Synonyms: Calm, soothe, quiet

Antonyms: Incite, agitate, provoke

5. Cognisant

Synonyms: Aware, conscious, informed, knowledgeable

Antonyms: Unaware, ignorant, oblivious

6. Curtailing

Synonyms: Constraining, trimming, slashing

Antonyms: Boosting, augmenting, extending

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7. Agitation

Synonyms: Anxiety, turmoil, commotion

Antonyms: Calmness, serenity, contentment

8. Helming

Synonyms: Leading, directing, commanding

Antonyms: Following, obeying, surrendering

9. Consolidated

Synonyms: United, merged, amalgamated

Antonyms: Separated, weakened, fragmented

10. Wreck

Synonyms: Ruin, destruction, devastation

Antonyms: Restoration, recovery, salvation

11. Rout

Synonyms: Defeat, overthrow, debacle

Antonyms: Victory, triumph, success

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