

## Agitation against Polavaram

Several organisations in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere have launched agitation against the proposed Polavaram project. The agitation is bound to get stronger with time due to the huge impacts of the project and the undemocratic, high handed attitude adopted by the centre and the state governments.

**The Project** It is proposed on the Godavari River named after the closest town in W Godavari district. It is estimated to cost Rs 9 265 Crores but recently the Chief Minister put this at 20,000 Crores. The project, which is now proposed to be implemented with certain modifications, was conceived over 50 years back. Its design is outdated and does not fully take into consideration the damage likely to be caused to the ecology and people and many changes that have taken place in the society over the years.

The Dam is to be constructed straight across the Godavari River some 15 km north of Rajmundhry in E Godavari district. The Dam will be constructed at a level of 150 feet (47 m). The submergence will stretch along the Sabari River, a tributary to Godavari, up to the borders of Orissa and Chhattisgarh.

**Canal System** The Right Main Canal will supply 80 tmcft (226 MCM) water to Budameru in Vijayawada, which opens into Krishna River upstream of Prakasam barrage. In this way the 174 km long canal will connect the Godavari and Krishna rivers. There has also been a proposal to make it navigable for freight boats.

The Left Main Canal is designed to provide water to 12 lakh acres in north coastal districts besides meeting the drinking water needs of urban and rural areas. It will connect with Yeleru Left Main canal to bring water for industries (Vizag steel plant) and drinking water supply. It will also supply north coastal districts of Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram and Srikakulam with irrigation water

**Displacement** The project brings misery to more than 2.0 lakh people, by submerging and displacing 276 villages- predominantly tribal villages in an area of about one lakh acres including forest land. The displaced will be forced to become migrant labourers and urban slum dwellers to which they will not be able to adjust in their lifetime. The situation thus would lead to many social and political conflicts.

The Project will submerge villages of Konta taluka in Dantewada district in Chhattisgarh along the Sabari River. Similarly villages along Sabari and Sileru Rivers in Motu taluka in Malkangiri district in Orissa will face submergence. However, the EIA has no specific information about these impacts in Chhattisgarh and Orissa. Nor has there been a public hearing in either of the states, of there is information of the project to the likely affected people or any R&R plans for them in the

EIA. The study done by National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) for the Godavari Krishna (Vijaywada) link scheme gave the following figures for submergence due to Polavaram project:

	Irrigated lands	Unirrigated lands	Uncultivable lands	Forest land	Riverbed land	Total
AP	620	27 500	12 688	3 705	15 550	60 063
MP	-	1 504	-	-	894	2 398
Orissa	-	1 026	-	-	204	1 230
Total	620	30 030	12 688	3 705	16648	63 691

Source: GKVL, NCAER, 1996

While the above table lists nil forest land from Chhattisgarh (all the lands reported under MP here is now in Chhattisgarh) as elsewhere in the NCAER study it is stated, "Most of the forest areas are on the left bank of the river in the E Godavari district of AP and Bastar (now Dantewada) district of MP on the Sabari river banks." Thus the above table does not seem to give correct picture in this respect.

### Villages, families, people in submergence zone

	Villages	Families	People
AP	233	15 235	135 449
MP	10	680	6 620
Orissa	7	292	2 743
Total	250	16207	144 812

Source: GKVL FR, NWDA, 2005

According to the latest estimates, the number of villages to go under submergence now is 276 from AP, 13 from Chhattisgarh and 10 from Orissa. No of affected families also has gone up to 27 798 from AP, 1372 from Chhattisgarh and 814 from Orissa.

### Properties in Submergence zone

	Permanent Houses	Semi Permanent Houses	Kutchha houses
AP	1 350	2 300	18 800
MP	42	-	300
Orissa	13	-	290
Total	1 405	2 300	19 390

Source: GKVL FR, NWDA, 2005

According to the NWDA FR, "The FRL of the Polavaram project is kept as 45.72 m, considering inter alia, the Godavari Water Disputes Tribunal Award. The submergence level considered in Andhra Pradesh including wave height is 48.80 m and that in Orissa and Madhya Pradesh including back water action is 52.82 m... The agreement of April, 1980 entered into between the States of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa incorporates certain provisions in respect of measures to be taken by the State of Andhra Pradesh including payment of compensation for submerged properties in the States of Madhya Pradesh and Orissa." For the areas in Orissa and MP above the level of 45.72 m, according to the 1980 agreement, AP is supposed to either pay the respect states the

compensation for such properties or shall make protective embankments and maintain the same. The choice will be the that of the respective states. Moreover the 1980 agreement also had stipulations for the manner of reservoir operation so that the pondage level is maintained to minimize submergence.

**Salient features of the Polavaram Project**

<b>Location</b>	
Latitude	170 13' N
Longitude	810 46' E
Dam site	Near Polavaram village in W Godavari dist, 42 km upstream of the existing Cotton Barrage at Dolaiswaram
Dam length	2310 m
Max ht above ground	48.32 m
<b>Hydrology</b>	
Catchment area	306643 sq km
Annual rainfall	1023 mm
Design flood	102000 cumecs
Available runoff at Polavaram dam site (Assessed by NWDA from computed series of 1951-52 to 1980 –81	
50% dependability	96549 MCM
75% dependability	80170 MCM
<b>Reservoir data</b>	
MDDL	41.15 m
FRL	45.72 m
Average bed level	15 m
Gross storage at FRL	194.6 TMC (5511 MCM)
Live storage	75.2 TMC
Design flood discharge	1.02 lakh cumecs
<b>Water Utilisation</b>	
Irrigation: LMC & RMC	193.36 TMC
Water supply to Vizag	23.44 TMC
Diversion to Krishna	84.7 TMC (incl evaporation)
Demands of Chhattisgarh	1.5 TMC
Demands of Orissa	5 TMC
Godavari Delta demand	274.57 TMC
TOTAL	582.57 TMC
<b>Irrigation</b>	
Gross command area	378888 Ha
Culturable command area	323396 Ha
Net Area to be irrigated	291114 Ha
Annual irrigation	436792 Ha
<b>Power</b>	
	12x80 MW installed capacity

**Submergence of Mineral wealth** According to the NCAER study, “A part of the area to be submerged has deposits of Chromite, graphite and iron ore. However, the detailed information about the quality and quantity of these minerals is not available. Therefore it is necessary to collect this data and assessment is to be made of the impact of submergence of such an area. The coal also occurs below the submersible area and this coalfield is a part of the important Sigaroni coal fields of South India. No detailed investigations have been carried out about the size of coal field. Therefore

it is difficult to assess the real impact due to submergence of this area. These facts need to be investigated before implementation of the project. Some actions will be necessary to minimize the loss of mineral deposits”. These are very revealing statements. The project EIA or cost benefit calculations have not looked these important losses that will be incurred due to the submergence of this mineral wealth. To push the project without that, at the MEF and the state govt seems to be doing, would be misleading the people and the nation.

The FR of the link on the NWDA website says that the loss due to submergence of the coal bearing area will be assessed at the DPR stage and that the only other mineral found in the area is graphite, but no assessment has been about the loss due to submergence of this wealth.

**Flawed EIA** The Polavaram Project EIA is based on outdated studies as the report was prepared in 1985. It then expected 150,697 people to be displaced from 226 villages. Since then the population has grown considerably. The data contained in executive summary of EIA regarding number of villages and population to be displaced does not tally with 2001 censuses figures and is far from ground realities. Further investigations are needed. As the present EIA is not comprehensive and contains inadequate or misleading data, the authenticity of the report is questionable and needs to be put to a thorough scrutiny.

**Opposition at Public Hearing** The people likely to be affected by the submergence, mostly tribal people, have not been informed about details of the project since the executive summery of the so called EIA report has not been made available to them in their local language. They are also not aware of the Rehabilitation packages being offered, and in short the State administration has totally failed to make the affected people in remote villages understand the implications of the Polavaram Project. The people are by and large kept in dark about the project.

**Mockery of PHs** But the State Administration had gone through the ritual of conducting PHs simultaneously in Khammam, W Godavari, E Godavari, Visakhapatnam and Krishna districts on 10<sup>th</sup> Oct '05. From the reports, it is clear that the public hearings had become farcical, as the proceedings were dominated by the followers of political leaders, hired crowds etc mobilised in large numbers by the political leaders from the areas not affected by the project, under the cover of police force, while the concerned officials have either become spectators or colluded with them.

As a result the lakhs of people facing submergence from the project and being rendered homeless and landless refugees have been deprived of the only opportunity available to raise and voice their concerns,

objections and opinions. The political leaders who have no place in PHs seem to have dominated the entire proceedings of the PHs, depriving the opportunity to the actual victims.

**Biased MEF** A team of officials of the Union Ministry of Environment & Forests is supposed to have visited the affected areas to assess the situation and meet some affected people, but the bias of the ministry became apparent when they visited only those areas and people where they knew the some selected persons were kept ready to speak in favour of the project.

**Forest and Protected Areas face submergence** The Forest Department has been asked to conduct the survey of the Flora & Fauna in the Reserve Forest Area likely to be submerged by the reservoir and is being pressurised to speed up the survey as per the latest reports (TOI 24x05). The land under notified Papi Hills Wild Life Sanctuary is also coming under submergence. The EIA report states that the diversion of this land sought has been cleared by The Chief Wildlife Warden, Govt of Andhra Pradesh, vide Letter No.1056 / 9V2-6 dated 8-8-1992. However, the CWW has not authority to allow such diversion. Moreover, as the subsequent Supreme Court order, no land of protected area can be diverted without express permission of the Supreme Court. By recommending clearance, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has violated a number of stipulations.

However, the forest clearance to the project is yet to be applied for. The work started by the state government without such a clearance is illegal as per the order of the Central Empowered Committee appointed by the Supreme Court in the Vedanta case in Orissa. Moreover as the MEF circular, before diversion of any forest area from the tribal areas, express consent of the gram sabha of the tribal area is necessary. This stipulation also seems to have been ignored by both the state govt and the MEF.

It seems the govt had sought diversion of 1850 Ha of reserved forest land for the polavaram reservoir, the part of which comes under Papikonda wild life sanctuary, but to what extent is not mentioned. The claimed approval given by the Chief wildlife warden in 1992 is not sufficient or adequate for the purpose, any diversion or dereservation of notified WLS part has to be ratified by the IG of Forest, MoEF and there has to be a Gazette Notification to that effect declaring such a diversion as it involves change in land use pattern. An approval given in 1992 cannot be valid as proper procedure was not followed by the Dept. as per the rules contained in FC Act, 1980.

Moreover the reserved forest proposed to be diverted are of rich nature having crown density ranging from 0.4 - 0.5 and are of moist to semi moist or some dry deciduous kind, which means the Govt has to make a provision of very large amount towards NPV as the

average NPV per Ha will be Rs 8 lacs and for total RF of 3223 Ha it will come to 25784 lacs which is not provided for in the project cost. This is an important point to notice as rich forest cover is being destroyed.

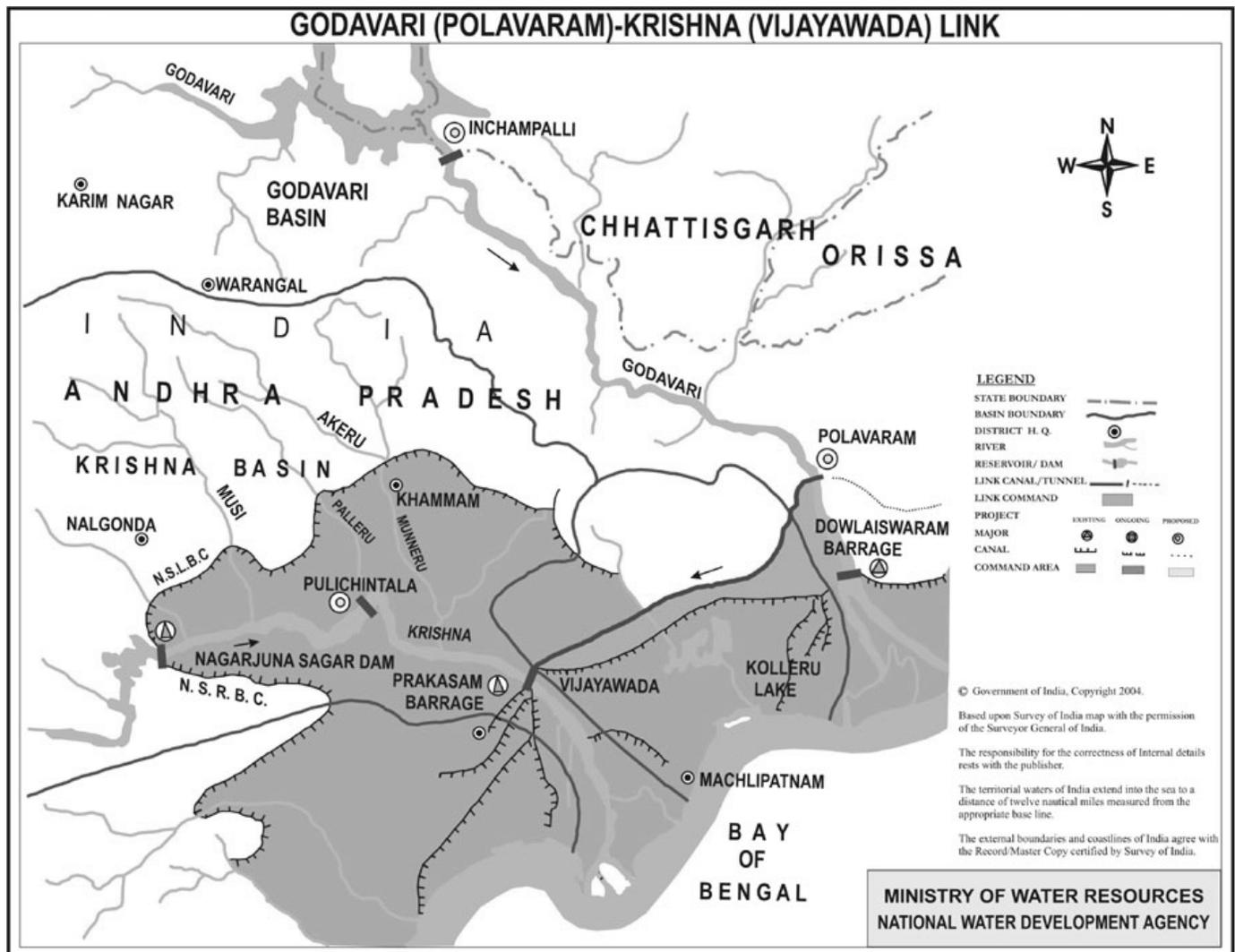
**Alternatives** The alternatives to the project have not even been explored. A number of options exist for the development and use of water of Godavari basin. A former chief engineer of the state has also suggested a non dam option. However, as is the usual situation, the EIA has not seriously tried to look at the options.

**Tribal stir** Tribals under the banner of the Adivasi Sankshema Parishad have decided to launch an agitation against the Polavaram project. The organisation termed the construction of the project against the interests of the tribals in three districts--Khammam, E and W Godavari and sought withdrawal of the proposal. The AVSP president said that the project would throw adivasis from 276 villages on the streets and render some 200 000 tribals homeless. (THE HINDU 070605, other clippings, messages from many organisations like Samata and individuals like Venkat Nagesh, among others)

**Godavari Tribunal** According to the FR of the Godavari Krishna (Vijaywada) ILR of the NWDA, the Interstate Godavari Water Dispute Tribunal had in its report directed the Polavaram Project should have FRL/MWL of 45.72 m (150 ft.).

**Polavaram in Parliament** In answer to a question in Lok Sabha on 190301, Union Minister of state for Water Resources stated, among other things, "As per summary record of discussions of the meeting held between the Chief Ministers of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh at Bangalore on 4th August, 1978, it was inter-alia decided that 80 TMC at 75 percent dependability of Godavari Waters from Polavaram Project can be diverted into Krishna river above Vijayawada Anicut displacing the discharges from Nagarjunsagar Project for Krishna Delta, thus enabling the use of the said 80 TMC for projects upstream of Nagarjunasagar. It was further agreed that 80 TMC shall be shared in the proportion of Andhra Pradesh 45 TMC, Karnataka and Maharashtra together 35 TMC. Governments of Maharashtra and Karnataka have subsequently agreed to share the 35 TMC between themselves as 21 TMC for Karnataka and 14 TMC for Maharashtra."

"The clearance of the Polavaram is linked to the resolution by the AP of the inter-State issues relating to submergence with Orissa & Chhattisgarh, preparation of R&R plans for the families to be displaced and preparation of updated DPR complying with outstanding observations of the appraising agencies."



Index map of Godavari (Polavaram) Krishna (Vijaywada) link from NWDA FR

In answer to a question in Rajya Sabha on 220403, Union Minister of state for water resources stated: "The Polavaram Project of AP has not yet been cleared for investment for want of resolution of inter-State issues & submission of remaining chapters of the DPR by the State for techno-economic appraisal by the Central appraising agencies... It envisages to provide annual irrigation to 436.8 thousand ha in E Godavari, Vishakhapatnam, Krishna & W Godavari dists of AP."

It is clear from the above that:

- Polavaram project will bring submergence in Orissa and Chhattisgarh, though the current EIA of the project does not mention this at all.
- Out of the 80 TMC (2265 MCM) water that would be supplied to Krishna basin, only 45 TMC is meant for Krishna basin in AP and 35 TMC will be taken away by upstream Krishna basin states of Maharashtra (14 TMC) and Karnataka (21 TMC).

**Additional water under ILR?** As per the feasibility report of the Godavari (Polavaram) Krishna (Vijaywada)

link on the website of ILR, the link proposes to transfer an additional 1236 MCM of water to Krishna basin in addition to the 2265 MCM mentioned above and about which there is an interstate agreement. The FR goes on to say that additional water will require fresh interstate agreement between the concerned states.

**Is it ILR or not?** While NWDA may call Polavaram as a ILR project, Andhra Pradesh is likely to have strong objections to this. Andhra Pradesh has raised a number of fundamental objections against the ILR proposals. Some of these are:

- In comments posted on the NWDA website, AP says, "Proposed Inchampalli and Polavaram Power Stations may not materialise due to lack of flows." That means AP feels that if ILR as a whole is implemented, Polavaram HEP may not work! Obviously AP cannot agree to treat Polavaram as part of ILR project? In spite of this, the AP CM, in a letter to the PM on 040204 requested that Polavaram project be taken up under ILR. Is AP falling into a trap?

**Orissa objections** In an interstate coordination meeting of ILR in May 05, Orissa made following comments which are posted on the NWDA website:

- Details of submergence in Orissa territory due to Polavaram Project with back water effect to be studied. Andhra Pradesh to make available submergence studies of Polavaram to Orissa for its comments and acceptance.
- Detailed environmental impact analysis and a study on the rehabilitation and resettlement of project affected people are to be submitted as committed under GWDT Award.
- An agreement should be reached between Andhra Pradesh and Orissa regarding submergence of area in the Orissa territory. *The agreement arrived at between States of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in 1980 has not been correctly reproduced in the feasibility report of the link project.* (Emphasis added.)

**Environmental clearance given: Flawed** Thus, in spite of all the violations and such serious nature of impacts of the project and in spite of having received protest communications from a number of individuals and organisations, the ministry went ahead and recommended clearance to the project in its meeting on October 19, 2005, subject to some information that the state govt has happily supplied. On Oct 25, '05, the clearance letter was issued, one of the rather super fast processes. It is clear that MEF has cross all boundaries of propriety and is not doing its job of protecting the environment at all.

In normal course for any project requiring both clearance from both forest angle and environmental angle, the environmental clearance cannot precede forest clearance, hence giving EC when forest clearance is not obtained in contrary to the normal norms. The project should not have been cleared without forestry clearance. Saying EC is conditional is very ambiguous and misleading.

The decision of MoEF to accord EC so expeditiously for a project of such a magnitude involving so many impacts, like loss of vast stretch of rich forest land, loss of flora and fauna, threat of loss of endangered species, displacement of more than 2 lac population which includes tribals and other less privileged people, submergence of 300 villages makes the clearance highly questionable. Particularly when it is a river valley project clubbed with linking of two major rivers, requiring a lot more thought and consultative process. The whole project in its present shape looks far beyond viable norms. How was it agreed to initiate what is going to be over Rs 20 000 crore project, when there is such a huge backlog of past unfinished projects and when there are no resources for even proper repair and maintenance of existing projects.

The project would submerge several archaeological sites like Gollagudem, Rudrama Kota and Tutigunta, which have even not been properly surveyed.

**Latest Developments** A big rally in the affected area faced severe state repression on October 25.

Tribal villages in the submergence area fall under Scheduled Areas notified in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. Under the 73rd Constitutional amendment, land can be acquired for a project in such areas only if the local bodies pass resolutions to that effect. Tribal villages have started passing resolutions against the project and its land acquisition process. They have decided to file cases of tress passing and intimidation if revenue or irrigation officials try to come to the area for survey and acquisition.

The state govt has no powers in the matter and only the president can denotify these villages and open them up for acquisition. Senior advocate K G Kannabiran said the state govt was "legally illiterate" if it did not know that.

While adivasi groups began to get organised, experts have let it out that the govt has been papering over crucial facts relating to submergence in Khammam in the reports it has submitted to the Central Water Commission for obtaining clearance for the project.

The Telangana Rashtra Samiti has stated that it will intensify the stir against the destructive project and had staged walk out in the assembly on October 08. A TRS leader has gone one fast in protest against the project.

Earlier the project was launched by the State Govt even before obtaining environment, forests and other statutory clearances from the Govt of India, Hon'ble AP High Court ordered Stay on the project. But the State Govt interpreting that the stay pertains only to the Barrage component of the project, continues to go ahead with the works connected with left & right canals.

**Conclusion** A number of actors are playing crucial role in pushing forward this rather destructive project. The state govt is playing the chief proponent of the project and the some of the opposition parties like the TDP and the BJP seems to have declared their support for the project. At centre, the chief proponents of the scheme include the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, Union Ministry of Water Resources and the NWDA. The Union government itself has not declared its view. Other crucial players who are silent so far include: the left parties, governments of Orissa & Chhattisgarh, the National Advisory Council and the courts. A number of national, state level and local level non governmental actors have opposed the move, but they seem to lack coordination at the moment. However, seeing the massive impacts of the project, it is bound to face stiff resistance. At the moment the state is trying its best to crush any resistance.