

Source: The Kathmandu Post; 21 Feb 2016

Oli, Modi inaugurate power line

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA

In a major boost to cross-border power trade, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi jointly inaugurated the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur cross-border transmission line on Saturday.

The power line is the first to come into operation among six such projects planned for cross-border power trade between the two countries. It is crucial for Nepal's plans to import an additional 600MW electricity from India by December 2017 to end load shedding.

The government on Thursday announced "National Energy Crisis Reduction and Electricity Development Decade" on Thursday, with an ambitious target of ending load shedding in next two years.

"Power import from India is one of the crucial components of this plan," said Sanjaya Sharma, spokesperson for the Ministry of Energy.

As per the plan, more than 50 percent of the country's electricity requirement during the dry season would be fulfilled through imports from India in the first year.

The country's installed capacity hydropower projects stands at 780MW, which drops to 300MW during the dry season.

NEA started importing electricity through this cross-border line from Wednesday. On the first day, 15MW of electricity was imported, which rose to 80MW on Saturday, according to NEA. In order to import 200MW electricity through the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur transmission Line, it is necessary to increase the capacity of sub-stations on the Nepali side, according to NEA.

Currently, only 132KW capacity of power line has been utilised.

"We have purchased equipment to upgrade the substations to 220KV and we hope to complete the installation by October this year. After that, we can import the promised 200MW power," said Chhetri.

The line can transmit 1,200MW of electricity and NEA plans not only to import but also to export power to India when there's a surplus in Nepal.

Speaking in Nepal's Parliament during his visit in August 2014, Modi had said: "Nepal can become a prosperous nation by selling electricity to India. We want to join you in your journey to prosperity."

In the latest energy emergency plan, the government has announced that feasibility studies and surveys of other planned transmission lines would also started immediately. "Necessary initiative will be taken to construct the 400KV Sunauli-Gorakhpur, 400KV Duhawi-Kataiya, 400KV Anarmani-Silgudhi, 400KV Kohalpur-Lucknow, 400KV Tikapur-Baleri and Rasuwagadhi-Kerung high voltage transmission lines," the plan states.

Following the import of the 80MW additional power, NEA has ended the one-hour extra power cut being imposed above the usual schedule during the day time. "We will probably end the practice for the night time as well within two-three days," said Bhuwan Chhetri, chief of NEA's Load Dispatch Centre.

Source: The Kathmandu Post; 22 Feb 2016

NEA overusing water of Kulekhani reservoir

Bid to limit power cuts

The water level at the Kulekhani reservoir has dropped sharply after the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) drew more water than usual to crank up power generation and ensure that load-shedding didn't go over 13 hours daily.

The reservoir at the 92 MW hydropower project has shrunk by 9 metres, the steepest fall in three-four years, said Bhuwan Chhetri, chief of the NEA's Load Dispatch Centre. The water level was also low this year due to poor rainfall.

According to Chhetri, the water level dropped by 6 metres in a single month (mid-January to mid-February). "Last year, the water level had gone down by only 1.5 metres," he said.

NEA officials said that they had used the power generated by the Kulekhani plant heavily this year after being assured that there would be an agreement with India for more power.

Nepal started receiving 80 MW of electricity from Wednesday after the NEA and India's NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam signed an agreement to import power through the 400 kV Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur cross-border transmission line.

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the increased power supply in New Delhi on Saturday. The power supply through the transmission line will be increased to 200 MW by October 2016 and to 600 MW by December 2017.

Meanwhile, the NEA has reduced the day-time power outage duration that was being imposed outside the schedule after additional power was received from India.

The authority was taking a risk by drawing more water from the Kulekhani reservoir amid swelling demand.

Keeping the water level at Kulekhani at a high level is important to maintain sustained power supply because it is the only reservoir-type project in the country. Run-of-the-river type projects produce less electricity during the winter when the water level in the rivers decrease.

According to Chhetri, the NEA would have been forced to increase the power cut to at least 16 hours daily if extra power had not been imported from India. Nepal was receiving 230 MW from India before another 80 MW was added recently.

The total power available in the system is 500 MW while the domestic requirement amounts to 1,325 MW during peak hours. The power crisis worsened this year as some of the hydropower projects delivering 70 MW of electricity to the NEA were damaged by the earthquake, according to NEA.

The 45 MW Bhote Koshi, 10 MW Sipring and other smaller power projects went dead after the earthquake. "Load-shedding would not have gone over 10 hours daily if these plants had not been damaged by the tremor," said Chhetri.

Source: The Kathmandu Post; 23 Feb 2016

Pancheshwar daydream

India has dragged its feet on the Mahakali-based multi-purpose project with a strong hydropower component

RAMESH KHATRY

As the Indian blockade was still continuing till the 26th of January, the celebration of the 67th Republic Day of India hardly caused a stir in our country. However, a piece of negative news caught people's attention: India has dragged its feet on the Mahakali based multi-purpose project with a strong hydropower component, which the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had promised to start within a year during his visit to Nepal in August 2014.

Modi is upset that Nepal's constitution did not bow down to India's wishes. Modi wanted Nepal to revert to being a Hindu state. This did not happen. So he is delaying the Pancheshwar project. India has not sent its four representatives to the Pancheshwar Development Authority although Nepal did so nine months ago. After two meetings of the governing body, the secretary of India's Water Resource Ministry Shashi Shekhar has been too busy to come to the third. Now, Nepal expects Wapcos India Limited to complete the Detailed Project Report within March. But we cannot believe their words until it actually happens.

Gloomy History

Ramesh Nath Pandey in his book *Kutniti ra Raajniti* explains that Girija Prasad Koirala's stubbornness had doomed the hydroelectric project right from the beginning. Koirala, during visit to India in 1992, had signed the Tanakpur "treaty" that envisions the Pancheshwar project. But his delegation of 72 people did not even include an expert in water resources, and Koirala evidently signed the treaty under Indian pressure. Koirala called the treaty merely an "agreement", and refused to bring it to Parliament for ratification. Even the demands of the opposition CPN-UML, the Supreme Court, his relative Matrika Koirala, and the Nepali Congress leaders like Ganesh Man Singh could not change Koirala's stubborn mind.

The former Indian ambassador to Nepal Krishna V. Rajan in the book, *The Ambassadors' Club*, claims that a new plan, the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project, during the time of the UML PM Manmohan Adhikari came to the rescue. "Each country would construct a 6,000 MW power station on its bank...The best part of this grand and ambitious venture would be that the Tanakpur project, which had caused so much irritation and misunderstanding between the two countries, would get subsumed in Pancheshwar." Governments in both India and Nepal changed rapidly after that. Nationalism on both sides took its toll. A junior member of the Indian delegation has been quoted in Rajan's book saying "I do not care if our PM has signed...I'll see how our water can be given to Nepal." The Nepali side retorted, "Water is the only thing we've got...we can't give it to India at any price!" From 1996, India gave sanctuary to Maoist leaders; yet it cited the rebellion as a hindrance to the project. The hijacking of the IC 814 Indian airplane from the Kathmandu airport in 1999 also doomed Pancheshwar.

No client state

India has always wanted Nepal to become its poodle, and the latter has always resisted that. Unlike India, Nepal never became a part of the British Raj. Some argue that after the Sugauli

Treaty of 1816, Nepal has never remained a fully independent state. Our country's unique geography has played against us in the past as it does now. The British India surrounded Nepal on three sides then; the republic India does the same now. Still the British sent ambassadors to Kathmandu, and invited different Rana prime ministers to visit Britain. These gestures indicated that Britain regarded Nepal as an independent state.

Problems between India and its neighbours Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal arise when India wants to treat them as client states like Bhutan. India has developed Bhutan's hydroelectric potential at a rapid pace because Bhutan has surrendered parts of its sovereignty to India; and the latter needs power for its industries. Bhutan cannot develop independent ties with other countries without India's permission, and relies totally on India for its security. Nepali authors argue that India prefers the outdated 1950 treaty with Nepal because the insecure Rana PM Mohan Shamsher agreed to India's control of Nepal's foreign affairs and defence needs. Rightly, King Mahendra drove out the Indian military that his father Tribhuvan had allowed in.

Nepal has suffered Indian blockades whenever it developed closer relations with China. About two years ago, Bhutan endured a similar Indian fuel embargo when it made the mistake of dealing with its northern neighbour. By halting subsidised gasoline and kerosene, India made sure a Bhutanese political party that would rubber-stamp its decisions came to power.

With a population of only 700,000, Bhutan has enough electricity for its needs, so it can export the surplus to India, the builder of its hydroelectric plants. Sikkim has produced enough power by harnessing the Tista River through Indian aid, but at the cost of losing its independence to India in 1975. Till now, Sikkim does not have its own airport. Becoming an Indian state, therefore, does not automatically bring a blessing.

Our own Pancheshwar

The recent Indian blockade has altered Nepal's relations with India forever. Now, Nepal will remain cautious of whatever sweet assurances India gives. The Pancheshwar project may forever remain a daydream. If so, Nepal should seek another partner, and avoid the corruption and bureaucratic red tape that made an investor like the Norwegian Statkraft pull out of the Tamakoshi hydropower project.

However, we have an even better way—PM Oli's positive challenge of each house producing at least 500 watts of solar power. My wife and I took our revenge on Modi when we installed solar panels for cooking and said goodbye to gas from India. We can have our own Pancheshwar (24 hours of electricity) if we make it a priority. For us, it was a choice between a new motorcycle and a solar powered kitchen. Our Pancheshwar won!

Khatry is the executive director of Association for Theological Education in Nepal

Source: The Kathmandu Post; 24 Feb 2016

Upper Marshyangdi-A hydro likely to be ready in Sept

AASH GURUNG

The construction of the Upper Marshyangdi-A hydropower plant is likely to be completed within the next seven months, the contractor for the 50 MW project said.

The contractor Sino Hydro Resources has planned to complete the construction work by September after it was delayed by the earthquake and Indian embargo which led to shortages of fuel and building materials.

Arjun Gurung, public relations officer of Sino Hydro Resources, said that the contractor had pushed the deadline back to September from January after work was held up by the tremor and blockade.

After the border closure was lifted at the beginning of February, the project has been making rapid progress. Gurung said that construction materials stuck at the border points had started arriving at the project site.

Sino Hydro Sagarmatha Power Company is the developer of the project in which Chinese company Sino Hydro has a 90 percent stake and Nepali company Sagarmatha Power Company holds the rest of the shares.

Karna Adhikari, public relations officer of Sino Hydro Sagarmatha Power Company, said that 85 percent of the construction work at the dam site in Nadi, Bhulbhule-5 had been completed. The powerhouse has been completed, and only the finishing touches have to be put in.

“Almost all the civil works have been completed,” said Adhikari. “Only a few tasks related to hydro-mechanical and electro-mechanical works which were affected by the blockade remain to be done.”

The estimated cost of the project is Rs12 billion, but the company said that there would be cost overruns amounting to Rs1 billion due to the earthquake and blockade. The construction of the project started in 2012.

According to project sources, the project has reduced the number of workers as the civil construction works are nearing completion. When the construction work was progressing in full swing, more than 1,300 people were working at the project. The workforce has now shrunk to 600 persons.

About 200 workers who

had gone home after the construction project came to a halt due to the blockade will be returning to work. “We are asking them to come back to work,” said Gurung. “We will hire more workers if required.” The number of Chinese workers employed at the project has decreased from 250 to 80. The project consumes 1,000 litres of diesel daily. The figure goes up to 2,500 litres when the entire workforce is present, according to Gurung.

The hydropower project will have two turbines each producing 25 MW of electricity. The powerhouse has been built at Bhulbhule-3 and a 6.5-km-long tunnel has been constructed to deliver water to the powerhouse from the dam site located at Bhulbhule-5.