

Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT)

Press Release

22nd July 2007

1. Reverend Stephen Lepcha, the Catholic Bishop of Darjeeling, visited the members of Affected Citizens of Teesta in Satyagarha at the STNM Hospital and BL House. He prayed for the welfare of the Lepcha Community and he hoped that there will be an early and amicable solution between ACT and the State Government.

2. ACT approaches CEC on 280 MW Panan hydro project Environmental Clearance allows project related activities inside Khangchendzonga National Park in violation of SC orders; CEC asks State Government to respond

The Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) has approached the Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC), asking for an immediate stay on the environmental clearance granted to the 280 MW Panan hydroelectric project coming up in Dzongu, North Sikkim. The application highlights the violation of important Supreme Court orders passed in Writ Petition (Civil) 202 of 1995, T. N. Godavarman vs Union of India, popularly referred to as the Forest Case. These orders prohibit carrying out certain activities inside National Parks and Sanctuaries, whereas the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) clearance illegally allows certain activities related to the Panan hydroelectric project to be carried out inside the Khangchendzonga National Park.

The application was filed on July 17th. An acknowledgement of the seriousness of the issue is the fact that on the next day itself, July 18th, the CEC has written to the Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim, asking for views of the State Government on the ACT application.

Former Forest Minister of Sikkim, Athup Lepcha, said: "The manner in which the MoEF has granted clearance to the Panan hydroelectric project in Sikkim in violation of Supreme Court orders is indeed shocking. The MoEF and its Expert Committee on River Valley and Hydroelectric Projects is continuing its recent trend of allowing destructive large hydroelectric projects in the ecologically and culturally sensitive Teesta river basin. I am afraid to say that the MoEF is increasingly functioning only as a 'clearing house' giving rubber stamp clearances. With the very ministry in charge of safeguarding the environment acting in such a callous manner, the ecological security of the country in general and Sikkim in particular is threatened. The State Government seems hell bent to implement these projects at all costs, even if it means violating SC orders."

Tseten Lepcha, Chief Coordinator ACT