

Minutes of the first meeting of the Task Force for Interlinking of Rivers held under the Chairmanship of Shri B.N. Navalawala, Chief Advisor, MoWR, RD & GR on 23rd April, 2015 at New Delhi

The first meeting of the Task Force for Interlinking of Rivers was held under the Chairmanship of Shri B.N. Navalawala, Chief Advisor, Ministry of WR, RD & GR on 23rd April, 2015 at New Delhi. The list of the participants of the meeting is at Annex-1.

2.0 At the outset the Chairman welcomed all Members of the Task Force and other participants of the meeting. In his opening remarks, the Chairman appreciated the sincere resolve of the Govt. of India for the implementation of ILR programme. He welcomed the constitution of the Task Force in this regard. He observed that the mandate of the Task Force as indicated in the ToRs given in the constitution was quite comprehensive covering almost all aspects of the ILR programme. He further observed that works assigned to the Task Force were quite challenging but expressed full hope that this body would rise to the occasion in order to meet the desired expectations.

3.0 For the benefit of the members of newly constituted Task Force, background and other summary details were presented by NWDA on following points-

(a) Earlier Task Force on Interlinking of Rivers was set up under the Chairmanship of Shri Suresh Prabhu, the then Member of Parliament in the year 2002 by the Government of India. Terms of Reference (ToR) for the present Task Force includes almost all ToRs of earlier Task Force (2002) with additional ToRs on the matters related to Intra-State, intra-basin link proposals and alternative plans in case the proposals in the National Perspective Plan are not feasible.

(b) Earlier Task Force was empowered with the following provisions as functional requirement:

(i) Besides Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Member-Secretary, nine part time members and one full time member (Shri Deepak Dasgupta, retired

Chairman, NHAI) were nominated in consultation with the Chairman of the Task Force and approval of the Hon'ble Prime Minister.

- (ii) The capital and revenue expenditure incurred by the Task Force was borne by the Central Government through the grants-in-aid to National Water Development Agency (NWDA).
- (iii) A separate office at Trikoot building in R.K. Puram, New Delhi was set up for secretariat of the Task Force with one Superintending Engineer with supporting officers/staff from NWDA exclusively placed in the Secretariat of the Task Force. Ministry also delegated financial powers to the Superintendent Engineer, NWDA to meet the day to day expenditure
- (iv) For effective co-ordination with various States and States holder, Chairman of the Task Force was designated with the status of Cabinet Minister to ensure appropriate protocol and successful execution of the project of national importance.

(c) It was informed that the Ministry of WR, RD & GR with the approval of Special Committee for Interlinking of Rivers has constituted following three Sub-Committees;

- (i) Sub-Committee for comprehensive evaluation of various studies;
- (ii) Sub-Committee for system studies for identification of most appropriate alternative plan; and
- (iii) Sub-Committee for restructuring of NWDA
- (iv) The Consensus Group set up by Ministry of WR, RD & GR in the year 2002 has been now renamed as Sub-Committee for Consensus Building through negotiations and arriving at agreements between concerned States.

The above Sub-Committees are assisting the Special Committee for Interlinking of Rivers in discharging its functions.

4.0 After the above presentation, the Chairman indicated that to carry out the assigned task for accomplishing its objectives the Task Force may also require the technical assistance of these Sub-Committees. Chairman also felt that issues of TA/DA and sitting fee etc. for the non-official members of the Task Force should

be settled by MoWR,RD&GR on priority. Thereafter, the Chairman solicited the views from each member which are given below:

(i) Shri Prodipto Ghosh mentioned that based on his experiences, he may contribute in respect of environmental issues involved in interlinking of rivers programme and also in evolving the funding mechanism for these projects.

(ii) Shri Sriram Vedire felt that the ToRs of the Task Force were overlapping with the ToRs of Sub-Committees set up with the approval of the Special Committee for ILR.He suggested that these Sub-Committees may be converted into Working Groups to work on the particular ToR of the Task Force. These Working Groups may provide feedback to the Task Force which in turn may assist Special Committee on all the matters related to Interlinking of Rivers Programme.

(iii) Shri Virag Gupta mentioned that the Special Committee for ILR has been constituted on the directions of the Hon'ble Supreme Court whereas the Task Force has been constituted by the Ministry of WR, RD & GR as per the directions of Union Cabinet. The Sub-Committees as indicated above have been set up with the approval of the Special Committee for ILR and, as such he raised the question of legal validity of reporting of the Sub-Committees to the Task Force. He suggested that the work carried out by the earlier Task Force and its recommendations on various issues involved in Interlinking of Rivers Programme should be considered by the present Task Force. Shri Gupta also emphasized upon the need to scrutinize Supreme Court proceedings and affidavits filed by the various State Governments to avoid any deviation by various States during execution of ILR Project. He also raised the issues of legal status, authority and mandate of present Task Force to complete the assignment in time bound manner.

(iv) Shri M. Gopalakrishnan mentioned that he had worked in the earlier Task Force on ILR (2002) also and explained in brief the work carried out by the earlier body. He mentioned that the earlier Task Force had prepared its report in the form of Action Plan-I and Action Plan-II and submitted to MoWR. Regarding consensus building amongst the States, he mentioned that Shri Suresh P. Prabhu, Chairman of the earlier Task Force himself took up the responsibility of consensus building and held discussions with various State Governments.

Also, Shri Gopalakrishnan drew the attention to the Action Plan I & II Reports submitted by the earlier Task Force wherein one can find full coverage of the various working groups which addressed several specific areas. There were 11 Working Groups and Core Groups like Independent Group of Experts for examining the 'alternative plans' suggested by individuals which were different from the ILR proposed under NPP, Communication Core Group, Critical Review Group etc.

(v) Shri A.D. Mohile observed the following:

- (a) The Special Committee for ILR has been set up with the directions of Hon'ble Supreme Court. As per the notification, the decision of the Special Committee for ILR shall take precedence over all administrative bodies created under the orders of Hon'ble Supreme Court or otherwise. These powers are with the Special Committee for ILR and not with the various Sub-Committees set up with the approval of Special Committee for ILR or Task Force. The Sub-Committees reporting to Task Force and the Task Force reporting to Special Committee for ILR is a long channel and as such various Sub-Committees and the Task Force should work in parallel and both should assist the Special Committee for ILR in the matters related to Interlinking of Rivers Programme;
- (b) The ToRs of the Task Force appear to be adequate except ToR No. II;
- (c) A member with the background of economics may be included in the Task Force;
- (d) The Sub-Committee for consensus building through negotiations and arriving at agreements between concerned States may not be much effective in the process of consensus building without statutory status. As such the Task Force should be given statutory status at appropriate level for effectively dealing with the States for consensus building;
- (e) The Task Force for carrying out its assigned task needs assistance of highly experienced experts in the water resources sector. As such, the experts with the thorough knowledge of water resources sector shall be hired.

(vi) Chairman, CWC suggested that the Task Force should first evolve a strategy for the implementation of Interlinking of Rivers Programme. The Task Force should initiate the work on negotiations with the concerned States. He mentioned that no State was agreeing about the available quantity of surplus water

in the various basins/sub-basins. He was of the opinion that if any of the NPP proposal required marginal modification/changes to make it more acceptable by the State Governments, we should agree to such modifications. He observed that the approach so far adopted in case of (i) Ken-Betwa link; (ii) Damanganga-Pinjal link; and (iii) Par-Tapi-Narmada link projects should be explored in discussions with the concerned States in respect of other link proposals.

(vii) Director General, NWDA and Member Secretary informed that the proposal for hiring of consultants of various categories had been submitted for approval of the Secretary (WR, RD & GR) and Chairman of Governing Body of NWDA. These consultants would be serving the requirements of the Sub-Committees as well as the Task Force. Also, he pointed out the present status of the staff / manpower position of NWDA, particularly of its headquarters office.

5.0 After detailed discussion and deliberations, members of the Task Force agreed on following suggestions and recommendations:

- (i) The ToR No. II of the Task Force which is given as “consider alternative plans in case the proposals in the National Perspective Plan are not feasible” may be modified as “to consider modification/marginal changes in the link proposals of National Perspective Plan to make them more acceptable”.
- (ii) To recommend to Special Committee for ILR that the Sub-Committees constituted with the said Committee would also assist the Task Force for ILR in carrying out its assigned task.
- (iii) The present Task Force may take the lead from the progress of the earlier Task Force on ILR (2002).
- (iv) The Chairman of the Task Force in consultation with the Hon'ble Minister may co-opt some few experts in the Task Force for effective functioning of the Task Force.
- (v) For consensus building amongst the concerned States, the Chairman of the Task Force shall have to hold discussions with the various States at various levels. In order to have effective communication with various stake holders and authorities, it would be desirable to ensure appropriate protocol for Chairman of the Task Force and for that, he be delegated with suitable legal empowerments as well as financial powers and also be designated

with the status of appropriate rank for the success of project of national importance.

- (vi) Separate Secretariat with supporting staff and infrastructure for the Task Force for ILR need to be set up at the earliest (in a time bound manner) so that it may start its operations.
- (vii) A separate EFC Memo for ILR Programme may be prepared, which would include the provisions for the expenditure of the Task Force for ILR besides NWDA, Special Committee, various Sub-committees and other relevant items.
- (viii) Terms of reference, status, payment structure for the other members/ expert of the task force need to be defined and implemented immediately.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

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List of the participants of the first meeting of the Task Force for Interlinking of Rivers held on 23.4.2015 at New Delhi.

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| 1. | Shri B.N. Navalawala,
Chief Advisor, Ministry of WR, RD & GR | Chairman |
| 2. | Shri Prodipto Ghosh,
Former Secretary, MoE&F &
Distnguished Fellow, TERI | Member |
| 3. | Shri A.B. Pandya,
Chairman, CWC | Member |
| 4. | Shri S.K. Kohli,
JS & FA, Ministry of WR, RD & GR | Member |
| 5. | Shri Sriram Vedire,
Advisor, Ministry of WR, RD & GR | Member |
| 6. | Shri A.D. Mohile,
Former Chairman, CWC | Member |
| 7. | Shri M. Gopalakrishnan,
Former Member, CWC | Member |
| 8. | Shri Virag Gupta,
Constitutional & Environmental Law Expert | Member |
| 9. | Shri S. Masood Husain
Director General, NWDA | Member-Secretary |

NWDA Officers (Invitees)

10. Shri R.K. Jain,
Chief Engineer (HQ), NWDA, New Delhi
11. Shri N.C. Jain,
Director (Tech.), NWDA, New Delhi
12. Shri K.P. Gupta,
Superintending Engineer, NWDA, New Delhi
13. Shri O.P.S. Kushwah,
Superintending Engineer, NWDA, New Delhi