

KINNAUR YOUTH SEEK AFFIDAVIT FROM ELECTION CANDIDATES AGAINST HYDROELECTRIC PROJECTS

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Cost of development: One of the hydel projects being built on the Sutlej in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh. V. V. KRISHNANKRISHNAN VV

As Himachal Pradesh prepares for the Assembly election on November 12, a group of youngsters in the State's tribal district of Kinnaur — which over the years has bore the brunt of environmental catastrophes — have decided to confront the candidates in the poll fray, asking them to give an 'affidavit' surrounding a promise against setting up of any new hydropower projects in the district.

The youngsters, who have almost a year ago launched the campaign 'No Means No' — against setting up of new hydro projects in Kinnaur — are now, in the run-up to the Assembly election, asking candidates of the Congress, the BJP, Independents, and others to give an affidavit, citing their proposed steps to deal with stopping construction of new hydro projects in Kinnaur. Also, they are demanding assurance over extending benefits from the ongoing power projects to the local residents.

"We want the candidates of political parties to give a written assurance through affidavit on the issue of stopping construction of new power projects in Kinnaur. Whatever the stand of the political party or candidates on the issue, we will then convey it through our meetings and social media platforms to people across the district. Our Kinnaur is a tribal district, which is ecologically sensitive and we are against setting up any more hydro projects. We have been demanding a complete ban on new hydro projects but politicians have been indifferent," Sunder Negi, a key member of the youth group, told *The Hindu*.

There are over 930 hydropower projects in Himachal Pradesh, which include mini, small, large and mega projects. Out of these, most of the projects are in Kinnaur, Chamba and Shimla districts.

Livelihood at stake

Vivek Negi, 25, of Akpa village which will be affected by the proposed construction of Jangi Thopan Powari Hydro-electric Project plant of 804 MW capacity near Jangi village, is anxious about the lives and livelihood of future generations.

"Our lives and livelihood are at stake. The way the fragile hills have been put under man-made pressure to exploit hydropower, the entire region has been witnessing a significant loss of life and property, especially during the monsoon. With transmission lines of hydro projects passing through forests, the trees are cut, putting our livelihood at stake. The politicians can't run from their responsibilities and hence we are asking them to spell out their commitment on the issue," he said.

The villages where the people and natural resources would be affected by the proposed project include Spillow, Kanan, Moorang, Jangi, and Rarang.

Pointing out that through the 'No means No' campaign the aim is to convey to the people across the district the ill-effects of power projects, Mr. Negi said it's the time to fight to save the Sutlej,

the lifeline of Kinnaur.

“The debris thrown in the riverbed of the Sutlej from construction sites are killing the river. People need to speak up before it’s too late,” added Mr. Negi.

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