

Not minister for stoppages: Jairam

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Sandeep Joshi

NEW DELHI: Under attack from his Cabinet colleagues for stalling various infrastructure projects, Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh has said he cannot become "minister for stoppages."

"I cannot become a minister for stoppages...I cannot become a minister who puts a stop to all ongoing projects. If 50 per cent of the work has already been completed, I cannot stop this work," he said while replying to a call-attention motion in the Rajya Sabha on the impact of big dams on environment in the North-east. Members from Assam had demanded the scrapping of Lower Subansiri hydro-electric project on the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border.

"Where projects are under implementation, all I can do is, insist on mitigation measures, neutralisation measures, environmental impact assessment measures so that the adverse environmental impact is minimal," he said.

Asked about the study by an expert group that had opposed the dam, Mr. Ramesh said he would be meeting members of the group next month and ensure that all necessary measures were taken so that there was no adverse impact on downstream population.



Jairam Ramesh

Pointing out that India has the potential of generating 1.5-lakh MW of hydro power while only 35,000 MW was being generated, Mr. Ramesh said so far successive governments had not been sensitive towards environment and biodiversity considerations linked to hydro power. "But now we are taking utmost care before clearing any project...we cannot repeat the insensitivity of the past. I do not hesitate to say no to projects that have adverse impact on environment and our people," he said.

Referring to the ongoing hydro power projects in Arunachal Pradesh, Mr. Ramesh said that from energy and strategic points of view India needed to develop these projects. About a dozen hydro power projects were in progress in Arunachal Pradesh, on which China lays its claim, and building these projects would also be important for India's strategic negotiating power with China, he added.