

KARNATAKA

‘Get forest clearances expeditiously for Mahadayi’

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Officers, however, say preparing all necessary documents before January next is difficult

Minister for Medium and Major Irrigation Ramesh Jarkiholi has directed officers to speed up the process of getting forest clearances for the Mahadayi and other irrigation projects.

He has set a deadline of January to prepare fresh proposals, wherever sought for by the Forest Department. Officers, however, are sceptical about readying the documents before the end of this year. He held meetings with officials in Bengaluru and Belagavi this week to learn about issues plaguing various irrigation projects and to explore solutions to them.

He told irrigation officers to sit with Forest Department officers and sort out their differences. He asked them to provide all documents that the Forest Department asks for and ensure that the approvals are ready soon. Apart from the Mahadayi, the Minister also reviewed progress on Mekedatu, Yattinahole and Gatti Basavanna irrigation projects.

When an officer said that the Forest Department was asking for renewed detailed project reports of the Mahadayi valley projects, the Minister asked them to prepare and submit them before January. “We had to tell the Minister that the projects would take time as they included not only re-estimation of the monetary costs but also a fresh evaluation of the environmental costs,” an officer who was present at the meeting said.

Mr. Jarkiholi asked senior engineers to accompany him during his visit to New Delhi to meet the Union Water Resources Ministry officials in January. Mr. Jarkiholi told the officers that the Union Water Resources Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat had assured him of putting approvals on a fast track by the Centre.

Officers say that preparing all necessary documents and set of pleadings before January is next to impossible.

For example, in the case of the Mahadayi, “we need to obtain the clearances from the Environment Ministry, before approaching the Forest Department. Environment clearances from the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests will take a long time as they include



environment impact assessment, public hearings and detailed explanations for answering objections raised by environment activists and neighbouring States. We are yet to compile some of the data sought for by the environment authorities as the earlier proposals were considered lapsed,” said another Irrigation Department Engineer.

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