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**Forest Ministry, not CMs, to blame Remuka project hanging fire**  
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While the Chief Ministers of Delhi and Himachal Pradesh are blaming each other for the inordinate delay in the execution of the Rs 1500 crore Remuka dam, facts reveal that the project could not make any headway for want of mandatory environmental clearance all these years.

The Union Ministry of Forests and Environment has already rejected the site clearance case last month as the project involves 485 hectare of government and private forest land, of which 49 hectare form part of the Remuka Wildlife Sanctuary. There are over two lakh trees of various species on the 319 hectare of government forest alone.

In fact, the ministry is bound by the orders of the Supreme Court dated November 13, 2000, which prohibits diversion or "dereservation" of wildlife sanctuary area. As such, despite the paramount importance of the project, the state or the Union Ministry can do little to get environmental clearance.

Initially, the ministry had asked the state electricity board to re-examine the proposal in view of the orders of the apex court, restraining the state government from removing dead, diseased and dying and fallen trees from national parks and wildlife sanctuary. Subsequently, the investigation division was asked to relocate the project to be set up upstream Dadahu on the Giri. The ministry was, thus, left with no option but to reject the proposal.

Senior officers of the board point out that the project could make a headway if the Delhi Government, the main beneficiary, moves the Supreme Court and seeks clearance as a special case in view of the acute shortage of water in the Capital. Instead of indulging in polemics and trying to score points over each other, the two Chief Ministers should make joint efforts for environmental clearance.

The project, which has been hanging fire since the past 11 years, will help provide 23 cusecs (cubic metre per second) of water to Delhi nine months in a year. Himachal does not have much stake as the generation of 40 mw electricity is only incidental. While the cost of the project right from, investigation to construction, will be met by the Delhi Government, the state will have to spend about Rs 125 crore for setting up the penstock and powerhouse.

So far the Delhi Government has released Rs 3.45 crore for the project. The board has, however, completed investigation using its own resources. It has also obtained the techno-economic clearance for the project. However, work can get underway only if legal initiative is taken to obtain environmental clearance from the Supreme Court.

With the Union Ministry of Forest and Environment adopting a liberal attitude in granting approval to states for diversion of forest land, vast expanse of green areas, some even falling in wildlife sanctuaries, were put to non-forestry use in recent years. The apex court took serious note of it and restrained the state government from diverting sanctuary areas.