Pragmatic comments by EMG and Ludu U Sein Win on Hydropower Project
- Win Htut

The Eleven Media Group and veteran journalist Ludu U Sein Win have explicitly made realistic comments on the article written in the state-owned newspapers issued on 9 August 2011 by “A Service Personnel of Electric Power” about the Hydropower Project being implemented in Myanmar.

The title of the article printed in the state-run newspapers was “Eternal Heritage through Gracious Generosity” with all the good features on the hydropower project, especially the advantages deriving from the Myitsone Dam hydropower project. The newspapers of the government printed, “With the aim to fulfill the needs of electrical power of the country in a short span of time, the projects with regards to generate electricity are being implemented in quantum leap forward. Despite the fact that the country is currently generating electricity in upswing from year to year, some people and organizations are spewing negative comments. These elements have been writing wrong information to mislead the general public on Myintsone Hydropower Plant being constructed by damming the Ayeyawady River downstream the confluence of the Maykha River and the Malikha River in the Kachin State.

Veteran journalist Ludu U Sein Win firmly pointed out that the talks and the articles contributed by many people on the topic to save the Ayeyawady River were neither imagination nor deliberate creation.

Ludu U Sein Win said, “I firmly and categorically stand against any person who accused the talks and writings on Ayeyawady River as fake and wrong creation. I totally disagree with that concept. Over the years, the Ayeyawady River is on the verge to disappear from view and we all are witnessing in our naked eyes. That is the reason that many news reports and articles advocating to save the Ayeyawady River are flooding across the nation. As a media person, one is ready to dissuade and discourage on the likelihood of calamity, disaster and disappearance of the river.”

Dr. Than Htut Aung, Chairman and CEO of the Eleven Media Group, cautiously welcomed the article printed in the state-run newspapers about the Myintsone Dam Hydropower Project, but raised relevant questions over the article.

“The first ever rejoinder or response from the side of the state-run newspapers towards the media is most welcomed. However, on behalf of the nation and the entire nationals, we have all the rights to point out and comments as the Fourth Estate of the country.”

Dr. Than Htut Aung continued, “A couple of months back, we the Eleven Media Group met and discussed with a ‘Think Tank Group’ at our Head Office. The said group was scheduled to meet with the Chinese officials and to submit the opinions and views in connection with the findings and observations on the Myintsone Confluence Project, the Natural Gas Project, and Kyaukphyu Deep Seaport Project. The members of the group are the young and the middle-aged persons about 30-40 years including Ph D holders from Universities in Singapore. They have not rejected the assumption and belief that the Myintsone Dam hydropower project would surely bring negative impacts to Myanmar people. The group promised that they would submit their findings and direct observations to the Chinese Government in professional spirit. The group was of the view that the intended dams numbering seven are not to be constructed. The group told us that if inevitably the situation called for the construction of the dams, only two small dams should be constructed.”

The article under reference mentioned in the state-run newspapers has many weaknesses and drawbacks in the eyes of the media as well as from the view of the technical experts.
He continued, “The article did not clearly point out on the advantages and the disadvantages to the state and the people. It mentioned that 2600 persons were employed and a few thousand family members were relocated in proper places. The statistics was ridiculous and funny against the backdrop of the mega project that concerned with the whole country. Moreover, it was inconclusive to assume that there is no negative effect in the lower part of the Ayeyawady River as the assumption was based only of the monthly figures of water flow. Even now, the physical images of Ayeyawady River are gradually silting due to the dams being constructed on the tributaries of Ayeyawady River. The waterways are changing. In some parts of Ayeyawady Delta, people are facing drinking water problems in summer. There is no guarantee whatsoever on the necessary backup with regards to the deterioration along the river. The writer of the said article referred the 569-page report of the Chinese Survey team. However, it failed to mention the integrity of the Chinese Team, the professionalism, and omitted the crucial point to whom it will favor between Myanmar and China. Moreover, the detailed observations on the 12 sectors were not mentioned. In most of the feasibility study reports, they usually touched upon both the advantages and the disadvantages. The writer of the article mentioned only six-point advantages. Omitting the disadvantages was very much unprofessional. Furthermore, the possible areas of inundation or the flood-plain were not mentioned.”

Moreover, Dr. Than Htut Aung commented on the writer for not explaining about the 900-page Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA Report) received amongst the public.

“According to the report, there are almost 500 square miles of inundated areas for a single dam and it is a 2 percent or 3 percent of the whole areas of Kachin State. Kachin State is a richest place of mineral resources in the country. In face of inundated areas, aboveground natural resources such as forests, tourist attraction sites, naturally beautiful geographical scenes, underground mineral resources such as gold, jade and oil might be lost. It is necessary to estimate whether these values have already been calculated. Moreover, job opportunities existing along the river course including biodiversities will be lost. These facts should be taken into consideration before building a dam. According to EIA Report, Chinese investment for the dam project is US$ 3.6 billion and this amount is not so high in comparison with the international norms. According to current news taking place among the public, profit share is not fair between Myanmar and China, it was learnt. In this state, the people pointed out that they are curious to know how to share the profits between Myanmar and China.”

Regarding the report, the ministry concerned should provide clear explanations to the people. In connection with the report, Dr. Than Htut Aung reviewed that all the entire national people should be aware that investors involved in the dam project should not place emphasis on self-interest.

“Ayeyawady is the National Heritage of all national people. Its debt of gratitude is very huge. We have full responsibility to protect national interest. It is required to consider and evaluate to be able to steer clear of untoward accidents and problems that will be rising in the future.”

The Ministry of Electric Power No. 1 of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the China Power Investment Corporation signed MoU on Maykha and Malikha Hydropower Projects including Ayeyawady Myitsone Dam in December 2006. Asia World Company from Myanmar side included in the project, it was learnt. Now, experts from home and abroad, observers, journalists are writing and airing on Myitsone dam hydropower project based on reliable facts and figures that is sure to bring negative impacts likely to trigger from the project.

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