Internet suspended in Arunachal's Upper Siang amid 36-hour bandh over mega dam project

Mobile internet was suspended in Upper Siang as a 36-hour bandh opposed the proposed Siang dam. The agitation reflects demands for detainees' release, community consent and a halt to surveys.

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Story highlights

- **Groups demand detained activists' release and immediate suspension of survey activities**
- **Organisers allege indigenous communities were excluded from consent-driven project decisions**
- **Local concerns include village submergence, displacement and threatened traditional livelihoods**

Mobile internet services have been suspended across Arunachal Pradesh's Upper Siang district as protests against the proposed 11,200-MW Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) intensified on Monday, November 2.

The suspension coincides with a 36-hour bandh called by the Siang Indigenous Farmers Forum (SIFF) and the SUMP Affected Area Youth Association (SAAYA), with support from student unions and community-based organisations. The bandh began at 5 am and covers Upper Siang, Siang and East Siang districts.

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The organisations have called the shutdown to demand the release of activists

detained during the agitation against the proposed hydropower project and an immediate halt to pre-feasibility report (PFR) survey activities in the affected areas.

The protest follows growing tensions over the proposed dam, with local organisations accusing the authorities of facilitating survey operations without the consent of indigenous communities. They have also opposed the deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) personnel in project-affected areas.

In a letter to the Bogum Bokang Welfare Society (BBWS), SAAYA said an emergency executive meeting held on October 29, attended by representatives of affected villages, had unanimously decided to organise the bandh in coordination with SIFF and other local organisations.

The association described the arrests of protesters as an attempt to silence indigenous communities and urged residents to participate in a peaceful and democratic movement.

The opposition to the project is rooted in concerns over the potential submergence of villages, loss of agricultural land and forests, displacement and disruption of traditional livelihoods. Reports suggest that 27 villages could face submergence, while several dozen others may be affected.

The proposed project, planned on the Siang River, is expected to generate 11,200 MW of electricity and is among India's largest planned hydropower initiatives.

The project has also assumed strategic significance for the Centre amid China's plans to construct a massive hydropower facility on the Yarlung Tsangpo River in Tibet, which enters India as the Siang.

Tensions in the region escalated in September and October as resistance to the proposed preliminary surveys intensified. Protesters objected to the presence of security personnel deployed to facilitate the exercise, maintaining that affected communities had not given their consent.

The situation deteriorated following incidents of violence during protests, including attacks on vehicles and public property. The district administration subsequently initiated arrests and preventive detentions and stepped up security deployment.

On October 11, the Upper Siang district administration imposed prohibitory restrictions on public gatherings amid the unrest.

Several community organisations have since demanded the release of detained activists, withdrawal of security personnel and suspension of survey operations.

The state government has maintained that the ongoing exercise is only a preliminary feasibility assessment and does not constitute a final decision to construct the dam. The Centre had also informed Parliament in August 2024 that the project was at the preliminary investigation stage and would require environmental clearances before construction could begin.

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