

Critical Appraisal of Sone River Commission Report

■ SARYU ROY

1. The Report prepared by Sone River Commission is incomplete even in essential parts. System studies were not by Central Water Commission, and yet, the report claims to have been on results of systems studies. It is unfortunate that a river basin plan for conservation, utilization and management has been finalized without applying systems techniques, for that matter, even without waiting for results of simulation studies said to be in progress in Central Water Commission. It is now reported that a separate report on simulation studies was submitted by Central Water Commission towards the end of March, 1988. It was circulated among the members on 29th/30th March, 1988. And, in its meeting on 6th April, 88, the Sone River Commission is reported to have cleared it stating that it is generally in order. Two points are very relevant in this regard. **Number one**, the so-called system studies comprise only simulation studies and that also for one alternative plan which envisages completion of all identified but not fully investigated projects. No alternative plans including one that would present the disastrous effects of on-going projects in MP & UP on the Sone irrigation system in Bihar has been studied. And, **Number two**, the members were not given time to study the so-called report in systems studies, which technically comprise of optimization and simulation studies on not one but several alternative plans and the sequencing of their implementation. Thus, it would show that the report prepared by Sone River Commission is not a comprehensive river basin plan.
2. The planning process adopted is a compromise between the comprehensive planning process originally adopted by the commission; and the time constraint imposed without considering that for over four years the commission functioned without a full-time Chief Engineer-cum-Member Secretary (the only full-time member of the commission) and all the focal technical group on which experts in different fields of water resources planning were represented, had been abolished by Central Water Commission. Such an action was deliberate and motivated to scuttle efforts on adopting latest techniques in river basin planning.
3. The Draft Report is at best only a compilation of existing, on-going and identified projects in the basin. It cannot be adopted as a comprehensive River basin plan because it lacks in essential studies and formulation schedule, and sequencing cumulative regional environmental impact (not apparent on project-by-project basis), keeping in view national goals and long- as well as medium term objectives. The report in the present form cannot be taken as “a recommended water and related land resources plan for the conservation, utilization, development and management of the Sone basin’s water and related land resources”.
4. The co-basin states will not take less than four to six months to examine this report (incomplete though it is even in basic details) and react to it. Thereafter, a year or so will be necessary to incorporate the modifications suggested. This also will be possible only if well-known experts in these fields are associated with the programme.
5. The second irrigation commission (1972) and the national commission on floods (1980) had recommended setting up of river basin commission and national water resources council. Much earlier than that the River Boards Act was passed by Parliament. But river basin commissions have not yet been set up only because the Central Water Commission has been obstructing it to protect the self-interests of a few officers. In 1983 the national water resources council was set up. Even in the Government resolution constituting water resources council it was mentioned that river basin commission will be set up and the council will receive plans and projects through river basin commissions, it is strange that in face of all this, instead of strengthening the existing river basin commission and setting up other commission, the Sone River Commission, the only of its kind in the country is being abolished.
6. It is resorted that the decision to close Sone River Commission prematurely was also influenced by the upper riparian state (s) who want unfettered option in regard to utilization of Sone waters. The unauthorized appropriation of Rihand waters for thermal power generation at Singrauli and in its neighborhood is a case in point in absence of Sone River Commission. There will be no central agency to maintain water account (State-wise), and no agency for guiding intergraded operation of water resources systems in this inter-state basin.

7. The winding up of field formation in-charge hydrological observations, project investigations, data collection and co-ordination with state Government agencies engaged on similar works will be disastrous. It will put at naught all that had been achieved thus far at a huge cost.
8. The erstwhile ministry of energy and irrigating, Government of India created the Sone River Commission through the resolution no. 19/5/77-DW.II/P.III dated the 1st March 1980 (copy enclosed in Annexure). The resolution says that (a) the Govt. of India in the Sone river commission; (b) The Sone river commission will conduct study of the Sone river and draw up a comprehensive plan for the region taking into account any readjustments in the use of waters considered necessary by the states; (c) Based on this study, further planning of irrigation and other benefits to the region will be undertaken after discussions and agreement among the states. Now a few following issues emerge out of it :
- i) There is no Government resolution as such, winding up the commission. It appears that some officers of the ministry, Central water commission and Sone river commission met and conspired to close it on their own;
 - ii) The commission was created in consultation with the Government of Co-basin but it has been wound up in spite of showing opposition by the State Government of Bihar;
 - iii) The report of Sone river commission is of critical importance to the lower riparian state of Bihar because based on it further planning of irrigation and other benefits will be undertaken. In spite of it, the Sone River commission did not agree to give some time to Bihar Government for studying the report. As stated earlier, the report on systems studies (only simulation study) was received by Bihar Government on 30.03.88 and the last meeting of the commission was held on 6.4.88 it was obviously not possible for the State Government to study the report and formulate views on it. Naturally no representative of State Government did attend this meeting; and yet the report was adopted, obviously with a view to justifying their earlier immature and inopportune decision to wind up the commission by 31.03.88.
 - iv) It is not clear as to who undertake the planning for irrigation and other benefits to this region now, as a matter of fact it is not clear as to who will present it and in what form before the National Water Resources Council. In absence of such decision, it is apprehended that the Central Government will now use this report against Bihar as it has although been doing so far. Bihar has suffered as upper riparian state in Damodar, Mayakdhi, Ajoy etc; and as lower riparian state in Sone.
9. The Union Government do have powers to regulate development in inter-state river basin but water a state subject it cannot wholly control it. The way the decision on creation of river basin commissions is being sidelined, if not thwarted altogether and the clandestine and hasty manner in which SRC has been wound up without formal Government order, it is feared that the state (s) will have no say in decisions in matters which impinge on their agro-and socio-economic conditions; and they will be at the mercy of a few officers of central water commission and the ministry of water resources. By the time, the Co-basin state meet to discuss the so-called report of SRC, there will be no SRC to answer questions and the Union Government might take the stand the report is sacrosanct and hence has to be adopted. If such a situation is allowed to develop, it would lead to long-run inter state dispute during which period Bihar will suffer immensely. It will also have repercussions on Centre-State relationship.