

To

The Editor
The Assam Tribune
P.O:- Assam Tribune
GNB Road, Chandmari
Guwahati – 781003

Sub:- Your editorial published in “The Assam Tribune” dated 12th March 2013

Sir,

Apropos your editorial published in 12th March 2013 issue of “The Assam Tribune”, you have, without any basis, leveled serious charges against Brahmaputra Board. Before writing the editorial, you should have collected detailed information which is readily available in the official website of the Brahmaputra Board. You could have also sought required information from the Brahmaputra Board or the Ministry of Water Resources under the ‘Right to Information Act-2005’. Instead, you depended heavily on assumptions and did not hesitate to call Brahmaputra Board a ‘White Elephant’. This is extremely unbecoming of an editor of a prestigious newspaper to which I am a regular subscriber for last more than thirty years.

Being an employee of Brahmaputra Board for last almost thirty years, I would like to inform that I am unable to digest the garbage spewed through your editorial. While deliberately attacking Brahmaputra Board, you have surprisingly remained silent on the activities vis-à-vis achievement of Water Resources Department of Government of Assam. You should know that Brahmaputra Board’s existence is not solely for solution of problems of Assam. The jurisdiction of the Board covers entire North Eastern States including Sikkim and part of West Bengal draining into Brahmaputra. Brahmaputra Board’s creation was not solely for management of flood and erosion problem of Assam. Water is basically a State Subject as per ‘Entry 17’ of Section XI - State List or List-I of Constitution of India. Therefore, the State Government is responsible to take measures for managing flood and erosion problem of Assam. Board Act does not empower Brahmaputra Board to take up unilaterally any flood management or erosion control projects. Besides the approval of Government of India, the concerned State Government has to issue ‘No Objection Certificate’ along with undertaking to take up operation and maintenance of any work to be taken up by Brahmaputra Board for implementation. Lands required for these projects have to be made available to the Board ‘free of cost’ by the concerned state.

As far as the assigned responsibilities of Brahmaputra Board – a Statutory Organisation, it has completed preparation of 57 Master Plans of Brahmaputra, Barak, their tributaries and rivers of Tripura. Board has prepared ‘Detailed Project Reports’ of large numbers of storage projects as recommended in the Master Plans and some of these DPRs have been techno-economically cleared by the Government of India. Board took up execution of one such storage project, on

receipt of 'NOC' of Government of Assam and approval of the project by the CCEA. However, the project is yet to take off- not because of fault on the part of Brahmaputra Board- but because of lack of support of concerned departments of Government of Assam. There are examples galore to prove this point and being a senior journalist, you can never remain unaware of this fact.

DPRs of projects with flood cushion prepared by Brahmaputra Board were subsequently transferred to other Central Agencies with proven track record like the NHPC, NEEPCO etc for implementation on a fast track in later part of nineties. However, not a single project could be commissioned in the NER by any of these organizations. This certainly proves that there are no lacunae in these organizations. The problem is with the system and all of us, including you are part of this system. Instead of hitting about the bushes, attempts should be made to correct the system.

Now, let us come to the issue of protection of Majuli Island from flood and erosion. Brahmaputra Board is involved in the protection works of Majuli since 2004. Before that, since the great earthquake of Assam till 2004, who was responsible to protect Majuli from flood and erosion? Board started implementation of anti-erosion works in Majuli – albeit in a small scale. But the relentless efforts over past ten years have paid good dividends- notwithstanding continued propaganda by the vested interests. Area of Majuli, as per the imageries obtained from National Remote Sensing Agency has been showing increasing trend since 2004.

You seem to be very much concerned about long term measures to contain flood and erosion. The only long term solution is construction of storage reservoirs in the upper catchment of the important tributaries of Brahmaputra. This has been clearly stated in the Master Plan of Brahmaputra Main Stem. Studies were also carried out by Brahmaputra Board which confirms this. The projects presently under construction or under consideration for implementation are mostly run-of-river projects without having any flood cushion. Therefore, unless storage projects are implemented with adequate flood cushion, there are no other alternatives but to go for conventional river training or anti-erosion measures like Spurs, RCC porcupine screens, embankments, bank revetment and launching apron etc.

Lastly, I shall be grateful, if you refrain from writing such editorial without proper studies and unnecessarily make Brahmaputra Board a scapegoat as is being done by other vested interests.

Yours faithfully,

(K.K.Bhagawati)
Mahanagar Path, Barsajai
P.O- Basistha
Mobile No. 9401596882