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Swades power in Arunachal

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DECEMBER 21 was the shortest day of the year in Arunachal Pradesh. Night descends early here at 4:15 pm since this tiny state is located in the eastern most tip of India.

On that fateful day, as the sun dipped over Kaho, the remotest village near the India-China border, Jinu Meyor, a government employee tried to convince villagers assembled in a little wooden house about the possibility of generating electricity from a nearby small stream. Kerosene lanterns twinkled across the border. Meyor stood there feeling optimistic as well as apprehensive about



Kaho's little hydro-electric power station

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being able to persuade his fellow villagers. This plan, to generate electricity from the stream, had been drawn up by executive engineer R K Joshi and myself as deputy commissioner,

Actually the villagers were sick and tired of such proposals put forward by government after government. They were not ready to part with the water of the stream and they saw it as a conspiracy to interfere in their village life. The small stream was their only source of water for drinking and irrigation. They were mostly small farmers. The villagers were not willing to cooperate but after consistent persuasion and some hard bargaining, that their water would not be disturbed, things turned around.

Although many of the villagers were heard muttering 'let us not waste our time', a handful of villagers were somewhat convinced that the government meant business this time and that they would be assured of water.

Nobody realised then that this was the beginning of a success story. Political will, developmental administration and engineering skills came together to implement an ambitious project. Perhaps people had seen the film, *Swades*, in which Shah Rukh Khan as an NRI comes back to build a small hydel plant.

In some ways the villagers were right in their apprehensions since constructing a hydro-electric project in such a remote area is truly a challenging task, Past efforts too were of no avail mainly because of the remoteness of the area in

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Now they don't have to trek miles to get their rice husked. The smile on one of the old villager's wrinkled face and the glow of gratitude in his sunken eyes was a reward nobody could ever equate. The moment still lingers in the hearts of all who were associated with the implementation of the project.

The project, which has a capacity of 10 KW, was then handed over to the village community who themselves are running and maintaining it smoothly since the past two years. The project has also benefited the soldiers guarding our porous borders as almost all their outposts are now electrified. The administration has provided a DTH and TV thereby enabling the hitherto isolated villagers an open window to the outside modern world.

Arunachal Pradesh's finance minister Kalikho Pul, who has always supported innovative people-friendly schemes, was all praise for the team.

Keeping this project as the model, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh has developed a Border Village Illumination Programme at an estimated cost of Rs 240 crore. On February 1, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced the programme at Itanagar covering all the villages in the border areas.