Central panel silent on role of Mullaperiyar

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The Central Water Commission (CWC), in its report on the role of dams in the Kerala floods, has omitted analysis of the operations of the Mullaperiyar dam, the contentious reservoir located in Kerala and operated by Tamil Nadu. It has, however, detailed descriptions of the water-release patterns in the Idukki and Idamalayar dams on August 15, 16, and 17, when the rains reached their zenith.

An official, who did not want to be identified, said this was because the Mullaperiyar dam had “no role” in magnifying the disaster — a position that is against the Kerala government’s position.

’No assurances given’

The role of the dam assumed significance after the Kerala government, on August 23, claimed in the Supreme Court that sudden release of water from the Mullaperiyar dam was a cause for the floods in the State. Kerala said communication from its Water Resources Secretary and the Chairman of the Supervisory Committee on Mullaperiyar dam to gradually release water evoked no “positive assurances” from the Tamil Nadu government.

The Mullaperiyar dam and the Idukki dam have similar catchment areas but the latter is about five times bigger in terms of storage.

“It was the dams on the lower Periyar that needed to be analysed. The Mullaperiyar dam (on the upper Periyar) didn’t play a role at all,” said the official, who didn’t want to be identified, citing matters pertaining to the dam as “sub judice.”

Another official in the Union Water Resources Ministry said the references to the dam were kept out as it would have detracted from the import of the study, namely, that it was the sheer volume of water on particular days between August 8 and 17 and not decisions around the release of water from the State’s major reservoirs, that was responsible for the devastation.

While there was a mention of the inflow and outflow of the water into the Mullaperiyar dam in the report, there was no description of whether it contributed to the deluge.