

## **Continued western intervention in stalling mega development projects in India**

By N.T.Ravindranath, dated 28 Nov.2017.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated the Sardar Sarovar dam to the nation at a function held at the project site at Dabhoi, in Vadodara district of Gujarat on September 17, 2017. Speaking on the occasion, Modi pointed out the hurdles and difficulties faced by the government while undertaking this project and said that there may not be any other project in the entire world which has faced as much hurdles as the Sarovar project. He charged that many big powers and even the World Bank had conspired to stall this project by raising human rights and environmental issues and pointed out that the World Bank had cancelled a loan of \$450 million sanctioned for the project in 1985, on the ground of the project being a flawed one. He said that because of all such hurdles, the work on the project which was inaugurated by late prime minister Nehru in August 1961 could be completed only in 2017, thus taking 56 years for its completion. He said that the Sarovar dam will be of immense benefit to the people of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. What the prime minister said about the role of certain big powers in causing the huge delay in completion of the Sardar Sarovar project is very true. Some western NGOs and their agents in India led by activist Medha Patkar had done everything possible to stall this project, causing the huge delay in completion of this project.

It was in 1985 that Medha Patkar, a social activist, first came to Narmada valley to study the rehabilitation and other problems of the project oustees, and launched a movement against the Narmada project with the aim of stalling the construction of dams on river Narmada citing improper and inadequate rehabilitation package for the project-affected people and environmental problems. Highlighting these issues and with the support and cooperation of other like-minded human rights, NGO and environmental activists, she soon started a nation-wide campaign against the Narmada project, called Narmada Bachao Andolan ( NBA). Medha Patkar's movement also drew the support from the international environmental community after her two trips to Washington in 1987 and 1989. Lori Udall of Environmental Defence Fund (EDF) in Washington had helped her in raising the NBA's concerns with the World Bank which had sanctioned a loan of \$450 million for the Sardar Sarovar Project. Acting upon her allegations, the World Bank had set up an Independent Review Committee to study the issue of rehabilitation of the project-affected people and other allegations raised by Ms. Patkar against the project. The Independent Review Committee report submitted in June 1992 described the

Sarovar Project as flawed and rehabilitation of all displaced people was far from satisfactory and also charged that the study on environmental impact of the project was not done properly. Following the release of this report, the NGO and environmental activists from across the world wrote an open letter to World Bank President Lewis Preston with a warning that if the Bank refused to withdraw the funding for the Sardar Sarovar Project, the NGOs would launch an international campaign to cut the government funding of the Bank. The letter endorsed by 250 NGOs from 37 countries was also published as a full-page advertisement in the London Financial Times. Full-page advertisements with similar demands were also placed in The Washington Post and New York Times by US-based environmental groups. Under pressure from such groups, the World Bank withdrew the funding for the project in March 1993. Earlier in April 1990, Medha Patkar had visited Tokyo to attend a symposium organized as part of her campaign against the Narmada Project in Japan which had sanctioned a loan of \$200 million for the purchase of turbines for the Sardar Sarovar Project. After Medha Patkar's meeting with some Japanese officials and leaders of some international NGOs like the 'Friends of the Earth', the Japanese government also had withdrawn any further funding for the Sarovar project. ( Ref. Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams, Patric MuCully).

From the facts mentioned above, it is clear that there were massive and collective efforts by so many western NGOs with the approval of their respective countries to stall or at least to delay the Narmada Valley Project as part of a western conspiracy to stall India's economic progress. Medha Patkar was just a tool used by these western agencies to implement their sinister designs against India. Prime Minister Modi knows all these facts as admitted by him while dedicating the Sarovar project to the nation on September 17 this year, by putting the blame for such a huge delay in completing the Sarovar project on some big powers without naming any particular country. But, the question arises as to why Modi is reluctant to take stern action to curb the activities of anti-development activists like Medha Patkar?

An Intelligence Bureau report dated June 3, 2014 sent to the prime minister had clearly stated in detail as to how the western-funded NGOs have been trying to block or delay almost all of India's mega development projects, since last few decades, by organizing and inciting the local tribals and other villagers to turn against the projects by warning them about the ill-effects of such projects like the loss of livelihood, displacement of people and health hazards, if such a project comes up in their area. As a result of the activities of this west-sponsored anti-development lobby, many of India's important mega development projects have been facing huge delays, thus negatively impacting our economic progress. Some

of the prestigious projects, like the POSCO steel project in Odisha, were even abandoned due to prolonged workers' agitation and legal hurdles created by the anti-development lobby. As per the IB report, the affected industries targeted by the NGO activists mainly fall under the following sectors.

- 1) Nuclear, thermal and hydro power plants
- 2) Extractive industries like mining of coal, uranium, limestone, oil and gas.
- 3) Big dams and ports
- 4) Steel and cement
- 5) Genetically modified organisms
- 6) Special Economic Zones.

This list covers almost all medium and mega development projects in India. The combined loss to the nation as a result of the NGO activism against development projects in India is estimated to be about 2 to 3% of GDP per annum, as per the IB report.

Despite knowing the extent of the damage being done to the economy by the disruptive activities of these foreign-funded NGO activist groups and the sinister designs of their western funding agencies behind supporting and funding this anti-development lobby in India, there does not seem to be any serious effort by the government to curb the disruptive activities of these NGO activist groups in India. These NGO and human rights groups were in the forefront of the campaign against Narendra Modi, when he was the chief minister of Gujarat, accusing him of being the butcher of Muslims and demanding his ouster from the CM post for his alleged involvement in the Gujarat riots of 2002. It was because of the efforts of this lobby that Modi was denied a visa to visit the US in 2005. So, naturally when Modi became the prime minister after his impressive electoral victory in the 2014 elections, it was expected that he will take stern action to put an end to the NGO terrorism in India. Prime Minister Modi did initiate some action against the undesirable activities of some NGOs like the Green Peace India, by putting severe restrictions on their activities in India, drawing severe criticism from many western countries. . But when the Modi government started imposing some restrictions on the Ford Foundation, it really raised an alarm in the State Department in speculation about further possible steps by Modi to dismantle the anti-national infrastructure that the West had meticulously built up in India over the years.

Panicked by such a possibility, the US sent some of its senior officials to Delhi to put pressure on the Modi government to refrain from any further action on the Ford Foundation in India and also to get whatever restrictions already imposed on its activities in India lifted. Because, the CIA-linked Ford Foundation is the most brutal and disruptive US instrument engaged in carrying out all the destabilization activities in India. Prominent Modi critics like Arvind Kejriwal and Teesta Satalvad are protégés of the Ford Foundation. It is most unfortunate that the Modi government ultimately succumbed to the pressures from the US government and lifted all restrictions on the Ford foundation in India.

Though the Modi government's crusade against foreign-funded activist NGOs still continues, the initial enthusiasm shown by the government in tracking and checking the misuse of foreign funds for undesirable activities in India, is now missing after the setback it received in acting against the Ford Foundation. Thus the disruptive forces engaged in blocking all developmental projects in India and supporting various militant and secessionist movements in the country, still remain assertive and arrogant. Some of the activists named in the 21-page IB report that exposed the anti-national activities of the activist NGOs, had the guts to dismiss the IB report as a cock and bull story. Their destructive activities in India still continue as before. The present status of two prestigious development projects as given under, one already abandoned and another still waiting to take off, is a classic case to highlight the gravity of this problem. The Modi government, despite having completed three and half years in power has not done anything so far to save these two projects.

### **India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO)**

The government of India had decided to set up a very important and prestigious neutrino research laboratory (INO) in India and had selected Singara in Nilgiri hills in Tamil Nadu as the most suitable location for this project. The whole universe is filled with neutrinos. They are so tiny that they can pass through anything and everything in this universe. Still, the scientists knew very little about these elusive particles. Scientists believe that the study of neutrinos will help us to understand the universe and its origin better. The project report for the INO was submitted in 2002. The approval for the project came in 2007. The Planning Commission also approved the project and allocated a sum of Rs 950 crore and earmarked Rs 315 crore for disbursement during the 11<sup>th</sup> plan. The ministry of environment and forests gave its clearance for the project in 2008. The proposed laboratory was to be housed in a man-made cave beneath the tallest peak of the Nilgiri hills in Tamil Nadu. There are only handful of such labs in the world, and the INO was slated to

be the most advanced among them and was expected to put India in the forefront of neutrino physics.

However, some NGO and environmental activists, who were opposed to this project from the beginning, started a vicious campaign against this project raking up issues like threat to the environment and wild life and spreading all sorts of lies and falsehood about this project with the sole aim of stalling this project. Mysteriously, some international agencies like World Wild-life Fund was also found taking an active part in this campaign. Even the then environment minister Jairam Ramesh and later Jayanti Natarajan, and also the Tamil Nadu Forest Department were also found favouring the anti-neutrino lobby.

Many eminent Indians like former president Dr. Abdul Kalam, and top scientists like late P.K.Iyengar (former chairman of Atomic Energy Commission) had shown keen interest in early commissioning of the INO project. In August 2007, eleven leading physicists including Nobel laureates Sheldon Glashow and Masatoshi Koshiha had written to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh urging him to intervene in the matter for early clearance for the project. However, the minister for environment and forests Jairam Ramesh rejected the proposal for the INO project at Singara on the ground that the project site falls in an elephant corridor and tiger reserve area. Singara was the site best suited for the location of INO project as per the site selection committee. It was declared as a tiger reserve area only in 2008 where as the forest clearance for the INO project at Singara was pending since 2006. Thus, it appears that Singara was declared as a tiger reserve area only to strengthen the cause of anti-INO lobby.

Thousands of scientists all over the world are engaged in unveiling the hidden mysteries of these elusive neutrinos. The experiments being carried out by the European Organization for Nuclear research (CERN) at its research lab in Geneva are also linked with the neutrino research. The proton-colliding experiments at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at Geneva with tentative evidence for the existence of Higgs boson (the God particle) has already created a sensation among the scientific community in the world. The neutrino research is certain to open the floodgate of new mysteries and revelations that could shock the mankind. We will now come to know more about the black hole, antimatter and dark energy through the neutrino research. The neutrino research is expected to change the complexion of the universe as it is perceived today. Another important fact is that the neutrino technology, just as the nuclear energy, could also have its use in military application. It is possible that those who master the neutrino technology will rule the earth in future. It is such an important project that the NGO lobby with the

support of then forest and environment minister and Sonia loyalist Jairam Ramesh successfully stalled at Singara.

The neutrino project site was subsequently shifted to the Bodi West Hills in Theni district in Tamil Nadu. It may be noted that the new site was earlier rejected by the site selection committee, for not being good enough for the location of the project. The neutrino project at Singara was to be commissioned in 2012. Because of the green hurdles created by the NGO lobby and the MoEF, the INO project, the country's biggest-ever research facility for basic sciences, will now be delayed by at least ten years. Even at the new site at Bodi West Hills in Theni, the NGO and environmental activists had started a campaign against the project raking up various issues and spreading all sorts of lies and falsehoods like that the underground facility will actually be dumping ground for nuclear waste, etc, to create a scare among the local villagers in order to stall the project.

An NGO called 'Poovulagin Nambarkal' (Friends of the Flower World) headed by one G.Sunder Rajan had lodged a complaint with the southern bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2015 alleging that the INO authorities had obtained the environmental clearance by concealing the fact that the Madhiketan Shola National Park in Iduki district of Kerala falls within just 4.9 kms from the proposed INO project site at Pottipuram and hence protected by the Wild Life Protection Act of 1972. The NGO further alleged that an unauthorized agency had conducted the study at the Bodi West Hills in Theni and submitted its report. Based on these allegations, the southern bench of National Green Tribunal on March 21, 2017 suspended the clearance given by the Environmental Ministry for the underground Neutrino Observatory project at Pottipuram in Theni district of Tamil Nadu. The NGT has now sought a fresh study report from an accredited agency to get a fresh green nod. The NGT also sought another clearance from National Board for Wild Life, as the INO project site lies near a national park. Thus, even the location of this prestigious basic science project which was approved by the government in 2008, still remains undecided.

In 2002, when Indian scientists first initiated the move to establish an India-based neutrino observatory at Singara in Tamil Nadu, there was no such neutrino project in China, nor was there any plan to start such a project in China. It was in 2008 that China decided to set up an underground laboratory at Jinping mountains for study and exploration of neutrinos and dark matter and its first phase was completed and inaugurated on December, 2010. Operated by Tsinghua University in Beijing, the Jinping Underground Laboratory is situated 2.4 km underneath the Jinping mountain in Sichuan province and it is the deepest such underground laboratory in

the world. The work on the second phase of this project, which was started in 2014, is also reported to have completed in January, 2017 and has become operational now. Whereas India, which started the initiative for setting up a neutrino project in 2002 itself, is still rotting at the initial stage itself after 15 long years, struggling to finalize even the project location because of the hurdles created by the anti-development lobby supported and funded by certain western agencies and also because of the callous negligence of the Indian bureaucracy.

### **POSCO Steel Project in Odisha**

The South Korean steel major POSCO and the government of Odisha had signed a MOU on 22d June, 2005, for setting up a mega steel plant of 12 million tonne per annum capacity at Jagatsinghpur in Orissa. This project with an investment of Rs.52000 crore, would have been the biggest foreign direct investment in India. Other linked components of the project include a captive mine, railway line, a captive port and an integrated township. The project was expected to give direct employment to 13000 people and indirect employment to about 35000 people. The first phase of the project was to be completed by 2010. Out of the 4004 acres of land acquired for the project only 438 acres belong to the local land owners. The company had undertaken all necessary steps for the rehabilitation of the project-affected people. However some local leaders, influenced by some outside NGOs, opposed this mega project raising issues like loss of livelihood of local villagers engaged in betel leaf and cashew nut cultivation and pisciculture. They further alleged that the proposed port at Jatadhari would affect the fishing community in the area, cause damage to the coastline and destroy the nesting habitat of endangered Olive Ridley turtle. These activists have also floated an organisation called POSCO Pratirodh Sangram Samiti to oppose the steel project. This Samiti was supported and guided by the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) led by social activists Ms.Medha Patkar and B.D.Sharma. A section of the villagers under the banner of the Sangram Samiti has been conducting protest programmes like dharna, demonstration, etc. against the project at regular intervals since the day the deal was signed on 22d.June 2005. Instigated by some NGO activists, the villagers have also been using violent means to prevent the POSCO's survey teams and the project officials from visiting the project sites. Medha Patkar and B.D.Sharma had addressed a protest dharna held against the project in front of the chief minister's residence on October 15, 2006. There was a clash between the supporters and opponents of the project at Naugaon, one of the project sites, on 25th November,2007 in which 12 people were injured. On February 16, 2014, hundreds of people marched to the project site at Nuagaon and torched the POSCO's prefabricated office and brought down a 33-metre long boundary wall.

The POSCO authorities also faced a lot of harassment and delay in getting necessary clearances from the ministry of environment and forests. Thus, this prestigious mega project has been stalled for more than a decade because of regulatory hurdles, delays in land acquisition, problems in securing mining leases and retrospective implementation of Forest Rights Act. The POSCO faced some harassment even from the UN when a UN human rights panel asked the POSCO on October 1, 2013 to immediately halt the work on the \$12 billion mega steel plant in Odisha alleging possible displacement of thousands of people and disruption of their livelihoods.

The region where the POSCO project is slated to come up is known for its gut-wrenching poverty and natural calamities. A mega project like the POSCO plant is certain to bring a lot of development and prosperity to the region, besides creating thousands of jobs for the unemployed youths in Odisha. However, the anti-development lobby is adamant on stalling this project at any cost. Fed up by the delays and hurdles created by the anti-development lobby, the South Korean steel major has now decided to abandon this project and has asked the state government to take back the land that they have already acquired for the project.

There are thousands of other projects in the country, similarly stalled by the hurdles created by the anti-development lobby, thereby negatively impacting our economic progress. The government should not only intervene and save all such projects, but enact necessary laws to bring to book all those activists who, influenced by their foreign masters, have adopted anti-development movement as an industry for their personal gains. Another important factor to be noted in this regard is the serious lapses on the part of the project and the government authorities in ensuring proper and timely rehabilitation of the project-affected people as promised before. The activists make a thorough study of all such lapses and loopholes before they start their anti-project agitation and it is for the government to ensure that no such loopholes are left for exploitation by the activist lobby.