

Narmada: Appeal For Support

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Narmada Bachao Andolan

2, Sai Nagar, Mata Chowk, Khandwa, M.P.

Phone : 094259 -28007, 094253 - 94606

E-mail : nobigdam bsnl.in

URGENT APPEAL FOR SUPPORT

16th June 2007

Dear friends,

Today is the 13th day of the indefinite dharna at Khandwa of the people of the Indira Sagar and Omkareshwar dams on the Narmada river. It is also the 11th day of the indefinite fast of five representatives of the struggle who have been on fast since the 6th of June 2007.

The dharna began on the 4th of June, 2007 with a resounding rally of over 12,000 oustees of the Indira Sagar and Omkareshwar dams in the town of Khandwa followed by a gherao of the NHDC (Narmada Hydro-Development Corporation) which is building the dam. Since then 5000 oustees have been sitting on dharna in Khandwa with the resolve that they would go back to their villages only when their demands are met.

The villagers have taken complete financial and logistical responsibility for the program, and the atmosphere is heady. Food for 5000 people is being cooked and served twice a day with the condiments and grain and dal brought by each individual villager and premises given to us by the local Gurdwara. There is a great deal of song and dance and sharing of experiences. Desks for filing complaints and counseling are also being run. Such has been the dire nature of the R&R process in the Indira Sagar and Omkareshwar dams, that more than 11,000 complaints have been prepared and filed with the NHDC in the last 13

days.

Dharna and Fast to continue until all demands are met

The activists sitting on indefinite fast are Krishnabai, Dalit woman from Village Bichola Mal, District Harda, ISP submergence, Surajbai, Dalit woman from Village Bichola Mal, District Harda, ISP submergence, Ashok Sharma, Village Gogalgaon, Omkareshwar dam submergence, Bhagwanbhai Sardar Sarovar submergence, senior activist of the NBA, and Chittaroopa Palit, activist of the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Today is the 11th day of their fast. Their spirits and their resolve to take the struggle to victory is very high. Naturally, however, their health is declining and weakness has come in. Particularly Krishnabai, a frail 32 kgs. is in great pain and is continuously vomiting.

Our demands

Our main demands in the Indira Sagar area are that

- (1) Agricultural land should be provided to the villagers who are facing fresh submergence in the thousands of acres of land now found in the surveys.
- (2) All adult sons and adult unmarried daughters of cultivators should be provided land or SRG as directed by the High Court in the Order dated 8.09.2007 and which the State Government is refusing to comply with.
- (3) Landless families should be provided 5 acres land in the draw-down of the Indira Sagar reservoir, along with irrigation facilities.
- (4) Employment guarantee schemes should be provided in every R&R site such as New Harsud, Kalapatha, Bangarda where people are undergoing starvation.
- (5) Thousands of houses that have been deliberately and illegally been left out of the acquisition process after surveys preceding Section 4 Notification and after in many cases the service of notices under Section 9 of the Land Acquisition Act should be included and compensation and R&R entitlements provided.

(6) Every R&R site should be leveled or where people have already spent thousands of rupees to build plinths in the undulating wastes of the R&R sites, compensation should be paid for the plinth filling.

For Omkareshwar, the demands are

(1) Agricultural land for the cultivators,

(2) land for the adult sons and unmarried adult daughters of the cultivators, as per the R&R Plan of 1993 for the Omkareshwar Project

(3) Land for the landless families as per the condition of the environmental clearance.

(4) Better facilities including sufficient potable water in the R&R sites.

Callousness of the state and the lack of response

Since the beginning of the dharna, the people have been facing the callousness of the State government who have till today not bothered to address the grave concerns of the people or initiate any serious negotiations. On the contrary in the last few days, they have been trying to bring the dharna to a halt. Two days ago, the water supply was stopped for 17 hours. Finally, only when the women blocked the streets, the authorities were forced to resume the water supply. The refusal of the state to respond to the popular struggle is extremely troubling but the people are determined that they will compel the state to accept their demands through democratic struggle.

High Court stipulates land for land

On the 18th of May 2007, in the case of the Omkareshwar dam, the Madhya Pradesh High Court had passed an Order directing that the gates of the dam should not be closed until all the villagers are rehabilitated with agricultural land as per the 1993 R&R Plan of the Project and only after giving them 6 months breathing time after the completion of R&R.

Supreme Court permits dam filling

However the State of Madhya Pradesh and NHDC filed Special Leave Petitions and on the 11th of June, the decision of the High Court was stayed

by the Supreme Court without going into the merits of the matter. The State Government and the NHDC stated on affidavit that of the 30 villages affected by the Omkareshwar dam, 25 villages would not be affected by the rise in level up to 189 meters, and the other 5 villages are already vacated.

However, the Supreme Court declined to pass any order on the land question and sent it back to the High Court while disposing off the SLPs. The matter begins in the High Court from the 18th of June, 2007. After the SC decision, the dam gates were closed on the 13th of June. The waters have reached crest level 184 meters in the last two days already and are rising further.

Repression in Omkareshwar villages after SC Order, resistance by people

It may be noted that in their affidavits in the High Court and Supreme Court, the State Government and the NHDC stated that of the 30 villages, only 5 villages are in the submergence at 189 meters and the other 25 villages will not be affected at 189 meters. Moreover, they also stated that even from these 5 villages, in Gunjari where 22 houses were denied compensation after having been given Section 9 notices not once but twice, would not be affected at 189 meters and its back-waters.

However immediately after the SC order, the State government started severing electricity and water in several villages like Ekhand and Gogalgaon by removing transformers. The villagers are resisting the disconnection of facilities fiercely in the villages. At the same time, on the 13th the people on dharna gheared the Khandwa Collectorate and demanded restoration of facilities and removal of police. As a result, the transformers have been re-connected. The villagers have now stated that since it has been said that they will not be affected at 189 meters, no officials should enter their villages.

Gunjari satyagraha begins against illegal submergence

Meanwhile, the 22 houses of Gunjari and several more houses of Bakhatgarh and Sailani and 115 families of Jiroth hamlet of Village Kelwa are likely to be submerged in the next one or two days - Gunjari probably in the next few hours. In

the face of the complete denial of their entitlements and the false affidavits of the State and Project authorities, the people of Gunjari have taken a decision to face the waters but not move. The people of the other villages have decided to join them in their satyagraha.

Appeal for support

As you can see, events are unfolding very quickly. Meanwhile the dharna and the indefinite fast continues and is taking its toll on the fasters. You are aware that both Indira Sagar and Omkareshwar dams are complete and are on the verge of full reservoir filling which will cause full submergence, are only stopped by the stay on the full filling of both these dams because of non-fulfillment of R&R, due to legal intervention by the NBA.

To ensure that this program of struggle against the tyranny and impunity of the NHDC and the State government and the fulfillment of the legal and just rights of the oustees, we need your help and support. We request you to:

1. Come to Khandwa to extend your support to struggling oustees.
2. Write to Chief Minister and Governor of

Madhya Pradesh asking them to fulfill the demands of oustees.

Shri Balram Jakhar, Shri Shivraj Singh Chowhan

Governor, Chief Minister,

Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh,

Raj Bhawan, Vallabh Bhawan,

Bhopal. Bhopal

Phone: (0755) 4223436/4080300 Phone: (0755) 2441033/2442231

Fax : (0755) 4080112 Fax : (0755) 2441781/2540501

3. Organise support programmes at your places.

We hope, as always, you will extend your full support to ensure the rights of thousands of struggling oustees.

In solidarity ,

Bhagwan Mukati, Alok Agarwal, Chittaroopa Palit, Krishnabai

Note:

Khanwa is on main Mumbai - Itarsi rail route

Khandwa is 3 hours by road from Indore