



India's Neutrino Observatory Opposed by Gram Sabhas

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Why in News

Gram Sabhas in different parts of Tamil Nadu have passed resolutions against the India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) and hydrocarbon exploration which, they feared, would be detrimental to their respective regions.

- INO is being constructed in the **Bodi West Hills** (Theni district) of Tamil Nadu.
- The site is near the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border and is close to the **Mathikettan Shola National Park**.
- **Vaigai river** passes through the Theni district.

Concerns

- The region was recovering from the **Gaja cyclone** and the rural economy was in a very bad state.
- The project may have **harmful effects on the fertility of the land** in the region and **adversely affect the agricultural community**, farm labourers and others dependent on the profession.
- Further, it can result in the migration of farm labourers.
- Villagers also alleged that they were **not involved in the decision-making process**.
- Massive scale of construction underground and controlled blasts, the vibrations from the explosions can badly affect the ecologically fragile **Western Ghats**.
- Other concerns voiced range from **radiation, structural damage to the mountain** to the **emission of hazardous chemicals**.

Environmental clearance

- **Environmental clearance was given** after going through the geotechnical investigation report on studies carried out for INO set aside the concerns related to radioactivity or leaching of water, besides having the impact of blasting on inhabitation in the vicinity.

- According to the **geotechnical investigation report** the operation of INO will have **no release of radioactive or toxic substances**.
- Earlier in 2019, the **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has upheld the environmental clearance granted in March 2018 to the project.
- However, the project could not be implemented until the approval of the **National Board of Wildlife** is also received.

Gram Sabha

- The term Gram Sabha is defined in the Constitution under **Article 243(b)**.
- It is the **primary and permanent body** of the Panchayati Raj system.
- The power to **annul a decision** of the Gram Sabha rests with the **Gram Sabha only**.
- **Composition:**
Persons, those who are **above 18** years, living in the village whose names are included in the **electoral rolls** for the Panchayat at the village level.
- **Powers and functions**
The constitution empowered the **State Legislatures to define the powers and functions** of the Gram Sabhas through laws passed by them.

India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO)

- The **INO** is aimed at building a world-class underground laboratory with a rock cover to conduct basic research on the neutrino.
- The INO will study atmospheric neutrinos only. Solar neutrinos have much lower energy than the detector can detect.
- The Tata Institute of Fundamental Research is the nodal institution. The observatory is to be built jointly with the Department of Atomic Energy and the Department of Science and Technology.
- It is not a weapons laboratory and will have no strategic or defence applications.

Source: TH