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## Kakodkar meets CM, pitches for Neutrino project

19 Dec 2008, 0102 hrs IST, B Aravind Kumar & M Gunasekaran, TNN

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CHENNAI: The proposed India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO), lying in the cans for the last two years for want of an ideal location, is in the news again. With top scientists in the country pitching for a location in Singara near Mudumalai in the ecologically sensitive Nilgiris Biosphere, Department of Atomic Energy chairman, Anil Kakodkar on Thursday made a personal appeal to Tamil Nadu chief minister M Karunanidhi when the two met in the city.

Kakodkar briefed the chief minister about the significance of the project, a pioneering study in particle physics. But, Karunanidhi, according to highly-placed sources, present during the meeting, is said to have told the DAE chief that while the state would be privileged to have such a world class scientific facility it was not in a position to disregard public apprehensions.

Citing opposition from environmentalists, forest officials and civil society at large in Nilgiris Biosphere, the chief minister told the DAE chairman that the government had the responsibility of addressing their reservations and was not in a position to take a hasty decision by granting permission immediately.

Karunanidhi apparently made it clear that the project could be approved only after convincing the locals and environmentalists, on the need to locate the project in the state without damaging the ecologically sensitive area. The site chosen runs through one of the prime elephant corridors and is also located in the periphery of the core tiger territory, the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. Asserting that the scientists were already working to create awareness on the project, Kakodkar promised to allay fears of the locals.

In fact, it has been a running battle between scientists and environmentalists over the project's location. While INO has been conceived on a scale larger than any other basic science project in the country, proposed to be set up at a cost of Rs 920 crore in the XI and XII five year plans, environmentalists have opposed it saying it would endanger wildlife.

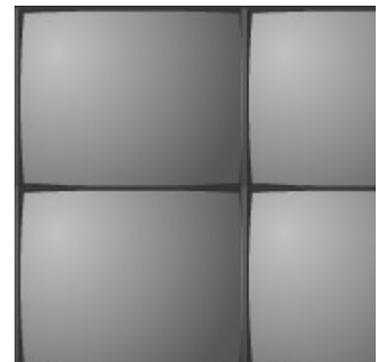
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"The observatory will be built under the ground in the middle of the forest, which is home to elephants, tigers and leopards. Since the observatory is to be built at least 1,000 metres under the ground, the tunnelling will cause damage to the environment," said A C Soundararajan, member, Nilgiris Wildlife Association. "Nearly 25% of the Asian elephant population uses the Singara corridor, the most important corridor from Mudumalai to Sathyamangalam," said Mohanraj, co-ordinator, Nilgiris Eastern Ghats, WWF.

Neutrinos are sub-atomic particles and are the most numerous particles in the universe. More than 50 scientists from about 15 institutes and universities have come together to promote the INO believing that neutrinos hold the key to several important and fundamental questions on the origin of the universe and energy production in stars. Singara was chosen on the grounds of safety, accessibility and minimal disturbance (during construction stage) to the environment.

In fact, environmentalists in Nilgiris have formed an umbrella organisation to fight projects like the INO. "We will never allow INO," said S Jayachanran, general secretary, Tamil Nadu Green Movement.

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