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Kakodkar presses Karunanidhi for neutrino observatory approval

R.K. Radhakrishnan

Neutrinos are naturally occurring particles

There is worldwide interest in this field

CHENNAI: Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Anil Kakodkar called on Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi on Thursday to discuss the setting up of a neutrino observatory in the State.

“I came here to seek the consent and approval [from the Chief Minister] for [setting up] the India-based Neutrino Observatory,” Mr. Kakodkar told reporters after the meeting.

Members of the high energy and nuclear physics community in India have been discussing, at least since 2000, the setting up of the India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) to study atmospheric neutrinos.

According to the INO website, hosted by the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, the observatory is a pure-science underground laboratory. “Its primary goal is to study the properties and interactions of weakly interacting, naturally occurring particles called neutrinos. There is a worldwide interest in this field due to its implications for several diverse and allied fields such as particle physics, cosmology and the origin of the universe, energy production mechanisms in the sun and other stars.”

The commission has chosen a spot in The Nilgiris, because some infrastructure (tunnels) is already there. It is two km from the Pykara TNEB camp and 1300 metres beneath the mountain named INO Peak (2207 m).

According to the website, the State government has given in-principle approval for locating the project at Singara near Masinagudi, pending statutory clearance. The project has been given environmental clearance by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests.

Surveys have been going on “for a while” at the site, sources said. The AEC chairman met the Chief Minister to formally seek his consent. The facility will be located in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve.

At the meeting, the Chief Minister was briefed about the need for the facility and its importance to the country and the scientific community.

Appreciating the need for the project, Mr. Karunanidhi felt that people living around the forest should be taken into confidence and made aware of the purpose of the project. Their consent was what mattered most.