

## BRIEF SUMMARY OF SONDUR DAM PROJECT

Sondur Dam Project across river Sondur, a right bank tributary of Mahanadi, was contemplated by the erstwhile Madhya Pradesh Government in 1972, with a view to augment supplies in Ravi Shankar Sagar Project (RSP) under the ambitious Mahanadi Reservoir Project Complex (MRP). From its evolution, the project was conceived on Sondur river, in Tehsil and Block Nagri, District Dhamtari with a view to impound water of the river for feeding/ augmenting supplies in Dudhawa reservoir and downstream RSP reservoir both on Mahanadi. The intervention of Sondur River at present site ,with FRL 471.065 mamsl made it plausible for providing *en-route* irrigation to proposed command area of kharif (12260 ha) in Nagri Tehsil ,besides augmenting supplies in RSP reservoir *enroute* Dudhawa reservoir otherwise it would have confluence with Mahanadi near Gariband ,a place afar downstream of the location of RSP ,without contributing to RSP for providing irrigation facilities to CCA (26210 ha) in Bhatapara Branch (km 45 to 85 km) .

After having carried out the appraisal of the project proposal, which was submitted in December 1976, the then Government accorded the administrative approval of Rs 1086.84 lakh on 4th March, 1977 and the Technical sanction issued by the competent authority on 26th April,1979. The revised Administrative Approval was accorded for Rs. 3399 lakh by the erstwhile M.P. Government on 20th November, 1982,

The work of the project ,which commenced in 1978, continued as per original design .The composite dam with homogeneous earthen section with top bund level 474.265 mamsl and the masonry dam section with 5 bays of spillway, crest level 461.07mamsl fitted radial gates (15mX10m) to pass the probable maximum flood of 5163 cumecs ,was completed in 1988. The work of feeder canal and excavation of the distributaries and sub - distributary was completed by June, 1997. However, the cement concrete lining in Nagri and Sihawa distributaries was completed 52% and 88% respectively by June, 1997. At present all civil and mechanical works are complete under the project, except works of B.K. minor under Nagri distributary.

Out of 2025.14ha forest land requirement, 944.92 ha stand transferred in November, 1979. Since full forest land was not transferred the Irrigation Department in 1991 submitted the revised proposal for diversion of balance 1080.22 ha forest land (529.70 ha under Sitanadi WLS and 550.52 under territorial forest). However, Government of India, considering the fact that 529.70 ha of forest land of Sitanadi Sanctuary will come under submergence rejected the proposal. State Government in 2003 resubmitted the proposal indicating that in lieu of 529.70 of forest land of Sitanadi Sanctuary, an another area of 671.983 ha of forest land will be included in the sanctuary. After the case was reconsidered, the Standing Committee of National

Board for Wild Life, Government of India in 2004 communicated the consent for this transfer of area from the sanctuary subject the various conditions.

The Government of Chhattisgarh had filed an application in 2005 to the Honourable Supreme Court of India seeking permission for the use of 529.70 ha of the forest land falling within Sitanadi Wild Life sanctuary for the Sondhur Reservoir Project. This matter was heard by the Honourable Apex Court and it was referred to the Central Empowered Committee (CEC). The CEC prepared report after examining the matter and recommended the transfer of land under Sitanadi WLS subject certain conditions. Hon'ble Supreme Court granted permission by its order dated, 5.7.2012 in IA NOs 370-1370A for diversification/denotification of 529.70 ha of Sita Nadi WLS and for compensating the forest area coming under the said sanctuary by the forest area adjacent to the sanctuary of the same ecology.

In view of the above permission, the State Government requested the Government of India for stage-I clearance under Forest Conservation Act. The MoEF, in view of recommendation of FAC, in 2014, asked the State Government to submit a fresh application.

In view of the increased cost of project, the case for revised administrative approval for Rs 557.11 crore was submitted on 17.12.2013 to the competent authority for grant of approval. The balance works under the project are still continuing. The balance work, *inter-alia*, include work under compensatory afforestation scheme in forest and non-forest area, catchment area treatment plan, wildlife conservation and management plan in impact zone, though to be executed by the Forest Department, are yet to commence. Therefore, in terms of provisions laid down under EIA Notification, 14th November, 2006, the project falls under category 1(c), being major irrigation project, shall require prior environmental clearance. Thus it is a peculiar situation that till November 2006 or the point of time investment on it did not exceed Rs 100 crores, whichever was earlier, the requirement of environmental clearance was not there, in other terms there was no violation of any EIA notification under EC, Act.

Now major balance works involved (compensatory afforestation, catchment area treatment plan, wildlife conservation and management plan in impact zone) are such which can be construed for betterment of the environment and are strictly by their nature are remediation plan for mitigating damage/ loss to ecology. Therefore, in pursuance of philosophy behind the EIA Notifications, it is imperative to bring Sondur Dam Project, an infra-structure project in tribal area of the state, in compliance with the environmental laws at the earliest, rather than bringing the situation to an embarrassing fiasco. Therefore, the EAC is requested to consider the case as per provision under para 13 (4) and prescribe the appropriate ToR, under para 13 (5), for carrying out EIA study and preparation of environment Management plan.