

### **Narmada Bachao Andolan**

- 62 M. G. Marg, Badwani, Madhya Pradesh 451551. Ph: (07290) 222464
- c/o B-13 Shivam Flats, Ellora Park, Baroda, Gujarat. Ph: (0265) 2282232
- Maitri Niwas, Tembewadi, Dhadgaon, dist. Nandurbar, Maharashtra. Ph: (02595) 220620

### **IS THE SARDAR SAROVAR DAM REALLY GUJARAT'S LIFELINE?**

#### **AN UPDATE ON BENEFITS SITUATION IN GUJARAT**

- Report shows only 15% of households in Kutch and Saurashtra getting water
- Sitting BJP MP under Modi says farmers not getting water or power in spite of Narmada Canal going through the district
- Renowned Ecologist says Narmada water in Rann (desert) wont work
- Modi government busy wasting water by "inter-linking" Narmada with mythical river Saraswati; a ploy to create sheer emotional appeal
- Government leasing out land to industrialists in SSP Command
- Large scale water-logging in the Sardar Sarovar command area this monsoon, including Jambusar
- Narmada main canal breaches again this year; lakhs of gallons of water floods nearby fields
- Narmada Main Canal becoming a watery grave for many desperate indebted families

This isn't the popular new game show *Kaun Banega Crorepati* (Indian version of 'Who wants to be a Millionaire') where Amitabh Bachan warns the person in the "Hot Seat" that they have 3 lifelines at their disposal in their quest to win a crore of rupees. This is real life. Where lifelines are not as dependable as they seem. And then it seems even more like a game. A political game.

The controversial Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada River has often been called Gujarat's lifeline. As Arundhati Roy described it in her essay 'The Greater Common Good', Gujarat convinced the Supreme Court about the necessity of the project by using the "emotive power of thirst". Kutch and Saurashtra are thirsty and need water, the Court was told. The Sardar Sarovar Project is their *only* solution.

The Narmada Bachao Andolan, the organization of people affected by the dam, has been saying for many years, including in the Supreme Court, that this is merely a political stunt adopted by different political parties merely for political gain. However, the Court was persuaded by the ideas of thirst and the oft-repeated benefits of dams, they consented to the dam being built; the dam height began to be raised. Today it stands at 110.64 metres. In fact, today it is stopped at 110.64 metres since the Supreme Court in March 2005 rightly ordered that rehabilitation MUST precede dam construction and submergence.

But as far as the benefits of the dam are concerned, whether it is water for Kutch and Saurashtra, or irrigation in Vadodara, Narmada or Ahmedabad district, slowly as reality unravels, the words of the NBA are indeed coming true in different ways. Recent reports coming from Gujarat itself show that the much-touted benefits of the project at the present dam height have not materialized.

#### **DRINKING WATER:**

The Narmada Canal Based Drinking Water Pipeline Project is supposed to provide Narmada canal water through a 2700 km long pipeline to over 8215 villages and 135 towns in Gujarat. A citizens' monitoring initiative was started by Pravah and IWMI-Tata Water Policy Programme (ITP) along with the Centre for Development Alternatives (CFDA) to monitor the implementation of the Narmada Pipeline Project (NPP) for the period May 2004 – April 2005. The study surveyed 1,188 out of 1,224 villages and reports on the first two rounds of the survey (May-July 2004; August-October 2004).

They found that, currently, only 1,224 villages and 32 towns are being supplied any water at all in Kutch and Saurashtra, which is a mere 15% of the area.

In addition, the study found that there were several problems with the delivery of water from the pipeline at the field level. The water supply is irregular and not dependable in terms of the frequency, timings and amount of supply. From August-October 2004, only 23.7% of surveyed villages received water on a daily basis. On days that villages received water, 43% received water for less than an hour a day and 47% of households felt that the quantity was inadequate.

#### **KATHIRIA ASKS FOR WATER AND POWER FOR FARMERS:**

In fact, these dismal statistics compared to the hype created around Narmada water, caused embarrassment for Narendra Modi on September 9 2005, when he visited the Saurashtra town of Morbi in Rajkot district, as reported by Hiral Dave of Indian Express. While some Modi ministers said that a magazine had rated Modi as the best chief minister in the country and a study by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation had found that Gujarat had the most conducive environment for industrial investment and development, but BJP MP Vallabh Kathiria chose to speak of the pain and anguish of farmers reeling under water and power crisis. "Though Narmada canal passes through Maliya, farmers of the region are facing acute water crisis. I request the Chief Minister to end their woes by ensuring supply of Narmada water," said Kathiria. Hence it is slowly becoming obvious that those who really need the water are not receiving it, as the NBA indeed predicted.

#### **LAND BEING LEASED TO INDUSTRIALISTS:**

Not only that, but now it has come to light that even land in the Command is being leased to big industrialists. While an overwhelming majority of grievances pending with the Grievance Redressal Authority (GRA) in Gujarat are land-related, the local government officials are telling the affected people that they won't buy any more land to allot to

people who have been allotted bad land. But the Asian Age reported on August 11, 2005 that the Gujarat government is preparing to lease over 26-lakh hectares non-agricultural land and 20-lakh hectare agricultural land in the SSP Command, to industrialists and big farmers for 20 years. Attention was drawn to this by Opposition Leader Modhwadia, who said this would benefit industrialists and rich farmers at the cost of small and marginal farmers.”

#### NARMADA WATER IN RANN WON'T WORK:

But in a more shocking revelation, D.V. Maheshwari of the Indian Express reported on September 13 that a noted ornithologist and ecologist Himmatsinhji, who is also a former prince of erstwhile state of Kutch, has ridiculed the idea of irrigating the Rann of Kutch by pouring Narmada water in the Little Rann of Kutch and turning it into a huge lake of sweet water.

Himmatsinhji said, “The idea, often repeated by Chief Minister Narendra Modi is foolish. If you pour sweet water of Narmada into the Rann, it would turn into salty water and will no way reclaim the Rann land,” he said, adding that it will be a total waste of precious water.

Hence it is slowly becoming evident that, as NBA indeed predicted, water is not reaching those who really need it in Kutch and Saurashtra, and actually even the plan of taking water to Kutch from the Sardar Sarovar might be a flawed one.

This is probably why the government of Gujarat is trying to find other uses for the water. Like reviving the long-lost mythical river Saraswati!

#### “INTER-LINKING” SARASWATI AND NARMADA:

On September 8, 2005, Narendra Modi celebrated a mini-Kumbhmela at Siddhpur town of North Gujarat, where he claimed to be creating history and changing geography by pouring Narmada waters into the extinct river Saraswati. In fact, Modi, in an email invitation to the program at Siddhpur received by NBA Baroda, stated that “Gujarat Government has started interlinking of rivers. Narmada, our major perennial river, is now networked with many other rivers of the State. As part of this exercise, Narmada is now interlinked with Saraswati river.” Did anyone see a DPR (Detailed Project Report) or even a Feasibility Report for this link? Was this so-called “link” accepted by the Ministries of Water resources and Environment & Forests? We think not. This is a foolish uninformed statement by the CM of Gujarat.

The NBA condemns this purely political move by Modi and urges that the water from the dam must be used for the purposes stated on affidavit before the Supreme Court, not poured in dry riverbeds.

In fact, it is interesting to note that the stretch of Saraswati which Modi is trying to resuscitate was actually receiving water till 1975. The reason it doesn't anymore, as

reported by the Times of India on August 25, 2005, was that the Mukteshwar dam was built in 1975, and the Saraswati dried up due to lack of recharging.

Isn't this what the NBA has been saying is the effect of dams on the downstream reaches of rivers? Perhaps Modi should decommission the Mukteshwar dam if indeed he is so keen to see the "pious river Saraswati" flowing once again.

#### CANAL BREAKS:

Not far from where Modi was celebrating the "inter-linking" of Narmada and Saraswati, the canal was getting de-linked! The Main Canal broke at several places for the second time this year (earlier one just 10 days before this) between Nani Kadhi and Narsinghpura in Mehsana district. This is the Y-junction spot in the canal, from where the Narmada canal goes towards Kutch. Loksatta (Gujarati) reported on September 18, 2005, that lakhs of gallons of water flooded out into the nearby agricultural fields causing a lot of damage to the fields.

When the main canal broke last year, huge breaks at many different places, the Gujarat government tried to hush-up the news. But it seems like they should rather put their energy into figuring out why the "wonder canal" keeps breaking, and into safeguarding those living near the canal, who are now confused as to whether they live in the 'benefits zone' or the 'submergence zone'.

#### WATER-LOGGING:

One reason for canal breaks is that no attention has been paid to existing drainage structures while planning this mammoth project. This has also caused immense water-logging in the command area, yet again this year. It is unfortunate that even rehabilitation sites, where people from the valley have been shifted, get water-logged. Baroli site in Naswadi taluka, Baroda District was flooded because a canal was constructed at 90-degrees to a river which naturally drained the rainwater from that region (photo enclosed). Similar situation prevails in Dharampuri, Thuwavi, Kamboia Kuva, Vadaj, Mota Habipura, Kothara, Karnet and many other rehabilitation sites in the command.

#### DYING IN THE 'WONDER CANAL':

Even as economists from Rajiv Gandhi Foundation are hailing the conducive economic environment of Gujarat, the news reports of suicide deaths resorted to by distressed indebted families are piling up. What is ironic is that they are ending their lives in the Narmada Main Canal, seen as a symbol of "growth and prosperity" for Gujarat. As Sachin Dave of TOI reported on September 5, 2005, "It has been called the 'Lifeline of Gujarat'. But for some 350 people in and around Gandhinagar, the Narmada main canal has proved to be a watery grave. Police records show 356 people as having died in these waters since August 2002, when the canal was filled with water for the first time."

The question that needs to be asked is: what kind of jobless economic growth is taking place, that so many people are so deeply distressed and so deep in debt that they are taking their own lives?

Is the Sardar Sarovar Dam really Gujarat's Lifeline?

With this state of benefits, the Gujarat government is once again at the doorsteps of the Narmada Control Authority (NCA), asking for permission to raise the height to 121 metres. But this is complete contempt of the Supreme Court, who ordered in March 2005 that the height of the Sardar Sarovar dam must not go up any further without full rehabilitation of all affected families under that height in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. But in any case, first Gujarat should use the water entirely at 110 metres, and only then think of taking the dam further at a huge economic, social and environmental cost.

The NBA urges you to distribute this information so that more people may become aware of the real situation of benefits of the much-hyped Sardar Sarovar Dam. If you live in Gujarat, ask your elected representatives to raise questions in the Legislative Assembly about all these aspects. Put pressure on your elected representatives at the Centre as well to raise questions about the shoddy state of SSP benefits.

Shankar Kagda

Dalsukh Tadvi

Dipti Bhatnagar

Medha Patkar