

India: Demanding Full Rehabilitation Narmada Valley Adivasi Oustees Stage Sit In

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by **Narmada Bachao Andolan**

Ardent on their demand of full rehabilitation, the adivasi oustees of Narmada valley from Maharashtra state are continuing their sit-in before the Divisional Commissioner, Nasik. It's the third day of their Dharna before the Commissioner. The previous day's dialogue with the Div. Commissioner, Mr. Eknath Davle, for more than 8 hours reached no concrete conclusion over rehabilitation issue, while other issues related to corruption, FRA, rationing, NREGA, division of Gram Panchayats, Health and Jeevanshalas built some consensus to a large extent. Yesterday, in the dialogue, the Commissioner was left with no answer when the adivasis posed serious questions about the availability of the land with the government in order to rehabilitate the Narmada oustees. Today the oustees were seen hopeful for the second round of dialogue with the Commissioner, which was schedule for today in the yesterday's meeting to continue discussion over the program of showing land to the oustees.

Narmada adivasi oustees began the third day of their sit-in, in the scorching hot weather where they were seen determined with their demands of rehabilitation and waited eagerly for the call for second round of dialogue. Finally, at around 2pm, they received the call for the dialogue from the Div. Commissioner office.

In a two and a half hour long meeting, the representative group of activists of Narmada Bachao Andolan, comprising of NBA patron Medha Patkar, Latika Rajput, Yogini Khanolkar, Chetan Salve and oustees Noorji Vasave, Noorji Padvi, and Jalma Vasave, raised the question on the practicality of the program of showing land to the oustees for rehabilitation by the Maharashtra administration before the Div. Commissioner. They said that it would be difficult for the farmers to follow the program of showing land in the monsoon season, as it is a time when they carry out sowing in the farms and less number of farmers would show up enabling the administration to create ex-parte cases as much as they could. Hence, a conspiracy sniffed to not to give land. The schedule given by the administration to show the land for rehabilitation starts from 27th April till 20th July. Yogini Khanolkar termed the schedule provided by the Div. Commissioner of showing of land for rehabilitation as 'illogical' and requested to include NBA activists help in drawing realistic schedule. She also informed the Div. Commissioner that there was a district level committee made by the government known as Land Showing, Selecting and Purchasing Committee, and she along with two NBA activists were the official member of that committee, hence they have all the rights to participate in the making of the schedule for showing the land and get the

authorized copy of the same which they had not got till then. Ms. Patkar on her turn demanded a meeting of Rehabilitation Planning Committee, which has Narmada Bachao Andolan's activists as its member, on the issue in the Mantralaya so as to illustrate the complete rehabilitation plan before the government. The activists group later produced a suggestive plan for the program of showing land to the oustees which the Commissioner accepted unwillingly and further forwarded to the Collector, Nandurbar.

Meanwhile the other activists also carried out the exercise of a complete review of statistics; giving final number of PAFs on the basis of joint survey by the Maharashtra administration. The Commissioner was also seen reluctant to accept the final figure of PAFs and at the same time found with no final data of PAFs with them. The discussion was still on with the Commissioner while writing this update, however, in the absence concrete assurance, the dharna is expected to continue for more days.

No Consensus built over Rehabilitation of Narmada Ousteers in the 8 hours long dialogue with Div. Commissioner Dissatisfied Narmada Ousteers Refused to withdraw agitation

April 15th | Nashik: Today, 400 adivasis along with activists from Sardar Sarovar affected area in Maharashtra continued their mass agitation inside the Divisional Commissioner office at Nasik Road. The serious problems arising from the ongoing construction at the Sardar Sarovar Dam, to further raise the height by 17 meters of the dam, beyond 122 meters (i.e. upto 139 meters) is a challenge to the 30 years old Narmada Bachao Andolan.

On the second day of the agitation, oustees, today, had dialogue for more than 8 hours with the Commissioner and other officers, on various issues, especially rehabilitation. "Where is the land?", "When can you take us to show it?", "When the deluge will occur this monsoon with 17 meters pillars? and may be, gates to be put up, how do you plan to rehabilitate hundreds of families in Maharashtra before that?" were some of the serious questions posed by the oustees present in the meeting with the Div. Commissioner.

To the very question, which asked for the number of families remained to be rehabilitated, the Commissioner refused to give a number, claiming that the same was never final. When NBA activists and village leaders dissected the situation to show that there are hundreds, who are to be declared but not shown land and there are another hundreds whose lands are not acquired.

The Commissioner could only respond in brief about the availability of land, which he informed that there was 200 hectares of land in Maharashtra and 460 hectares in Gujarat, i.e. a total of 660 hectares of land to be shown. It was with much pressure and questioning that the Commissioner could provide a schedule of showing lands which will be starting starting from 27th April but that too without details. But in the end, the oustees found the assurance received to be vague and decided to continue with the Dharna until something concrete comes out.

Altogether, the detailed lists and agreements prove that not less than 1200 families who will have to be pm-igiven 1 or 2 hectares of land each, would require a total land of 2500 hectares. That chart provided by us also brought out that how a few hundreds adivasis did not have their lands/houses acquired. Without land acquisitions, how had the government submerged their land, was another serious question posed.

There was also detailed discussion on the corruption, NREGA, PDS in rationing and also problem in rehabilitation sites. Various decisions such as Mid-Day meal to be tried for Jeevanshalas, social audit, Jansunwai at Tehsil level to be organized, enquiry into NREGA scams, restarting Gharponch grain scheme etc.

Since the people felt they were cheated in the process, they refused to withdraw the agitation today. The dharna-sit-in, however, was shifted outside the Commissioner camp! The next step with the agitation will be declared soon.

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Narmada Bachao Andolan,
Narmada-Ashish, Off Kasravad Road,
Navalpura, Badwani,
Madhya Pradesh – 451551
Ph: 07290-291464; Fax: 07290-222549

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For media inquiries: editors@asia-pacificresearch.com