

Subernarekha Irrigation Project Xinxed By World Bank

In course of execution of this project as many as 60 large and small mission of the bank involving 447 staff weeks visited the project area and project headquarters from 1979 to 1989. They spent, in all, over 242 days in the project area. The project engineers and the administrators naturally spent at least twice the number of days in preparing reports, filling in questionnaires and arranging their visit to different offices and project sites. All these in fact, resulted in confusion getting worse confounded every time and told upon the progress of work and performance of workers. World Bank claim, that such visit went a long way in enhancing the capability of project engineers are totally misplaced. Of course the members of various mission appeared to be learning during their visits and discussions hopefully they will render better services to other project elsewhere in future.

Revealing points

Conceived in: 1974

Work started in: 1983

Initial estimated cost: Rs. 129 crore

Current estimated cost: Rs. 1500 crore

Initial projected time for completion: 20 years at least C.W.C. clearance 1975

Posed for WB assistance 1975

Approval of phase I assistance 1982 (17.08.1982)

The too many visits of experts and missions from World Bank side resulted into direct and indirect interference with the established codes and practices of the state government. Introduction of five to ten percent mobilization advance to contractors and unilateral appointment of private consultants caused colossal loss of several crores. For SMP the CWC has been designated as technical consultant. But the World Bank on its own appointed a private consultant and with his connivance got the design flood discharge of Chandil and Icha dams abnormally increased. It was due to their undue pressure that the project authorities succumbed to this drastic increase resulting in enormous cost escalation.

It is strange that the World Bank keeps on sending mission after mission to Bihar even when they have stopped financing for the past two years. Their mission to are interfering time and again in the process of selection of consultant for preparation of feasibility report of the second phase of the SMP. The World Bank officials are exerting undue pressure on the government of Bihar to engage the same consultant who was projected director in preparation of feasibility report of the SMP phase I. incidentally soon after signing the phase I feasibility report papers that consultant was engaged in the World Bank services. Due to interference of World Bank, the proofs of which are present in state government files, the feasibility report preparation process is pending since early 1989. In March 1989 the Bihar irrigation department official under the World Bank pressure issued letter to this consultant to begin the work even without proper government order at a higher cost, which was ultimately stalled by the finance department.

Next time in June 1989 fresh tender was invited for this purpose. This time the favourite consultant failed to submit tender documents on time. As a result the whole tender process was cancelled at the behest of the World Bank. Now the World Bank is insisting on involvement of foreign consultant in preparation of second phase feasibility report of SMP. The irrigation department officials are dancing to the tunes of the World Bank pressure in this regard since last one year and the decision is likely to be taken soon to appoint the World Bank's favourite consultant in collaboration with one foreign consultant at a cost of over Rs. 2.75 crore with 25 percent in foreign currency instead of earlier estimated charge of Rs.20 lakh only.

Possibly there is a nexus between the World Bank and some consultancy firm who could do whatever the World Bank wanted them to do. The way the World Bank has so far succeeded in non-implementation of Kharkai barrage and Kharkhi canal system, essential of Bihar, in connivance with a Delhi-based consultancy firm bear testimony to this. At one hand the bank found their work unsatisfactory in earlier assignments and on the other they have been forcefully recommended for future assignment. Based on incomplete and incorrect studies done by this consultancy firm the World Bank is trying to drive a wedge between Bihar and Orissa.

This firm engaged for operation and maintenance studies for the Subernarekha has recently completed the water availability study which has shown that the annual average run of the Subernarekha River at Galudih is about 10 percent higher than previously estimated. Even at the draft stage the report was made available to Orissa and the World Bank is now insisting on distribution of this imaginary water increase between Orissa and West Bengal according to the tripartite agreement. Similarly the World Bank is pressing hard Bihar for accepting the release pattern of Icha reservoir against the spirit of the tripartite agreement and basic formulations of the SMP.

The World Bank's approach towards environmental impact of the SMP is also revealing. The bank avoided environmental impact study of project during pre-sanction appraisal. The staff appraisal report did not contain programme of such studies even during implementation stage of the project. So much so that when the Bihar government officials submitted the proposal to World Bank in this regard the bank flatly refused on the ground that it was not included in the staff appraisal report and hence, its cost was not reimbursable. But now suddenly the bank has become champion of environmental protection and it's creating problems for project authorities in various ways.

The position now is that the World Bank is engaged in arm-twisting exercise and excreting undue pressure on the government of Bihar in the name of founding of the second phase of the SMP. Be it the issue of appointing consultants of its own choice or fixing Icha reservoir release pattern in favour of Orissa or implementation of tripartite agreement against the interests of Bihar, the World Bank is using the sword of second phase funding which is yet a mirage. The project cost estimates at present price has gone to Rs.1500 crore and if the state government documents prepared in consultation with the World Bank officials are any indication the remaining part of this project will need at least 20 years more and no body knows how many more phases according to World Bank's 'flexiplanning' approach will have to be crossed before the complete implementation of the SMP project and full development of Subernarekha irrigation system. In fact Bihar's 'steak of gold i.e. Subernarekha' is mortgaged with the world.