B'lore to Ladakh, in search of the sun

World's Largest Solar Telescope To Aid IIA Team's Project In Merak

Rhik Kundu | TNN

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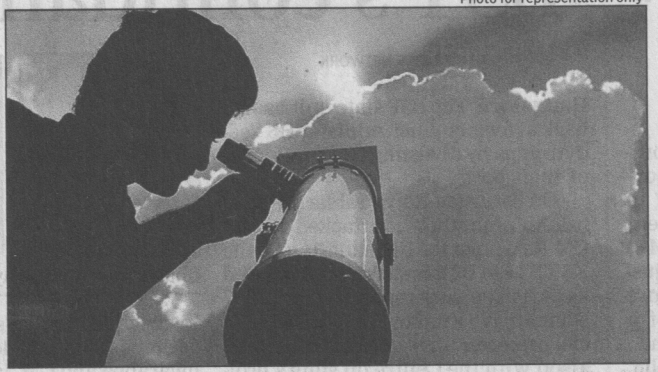

AIMING AT THE SUN: Solar telescope with a two-metre aperture will be installed in Pangong lake at Merak village in Ladakh by 2016-17

> National Large Solar Telescope will help scientists carry out cutting-edge research aimed at understanding the fundamental processes taking place on the sun. The core team to build the telescope is already in place
>
> **Siraj Hasan** | FORMER IIA DIRECTOR AND PROJECT HEAD

Bangalore: What are the fundamental processes taking place on the sun? How does it work? A team of scientists from Bangalore-based Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) hopes to find answers to these queries as they embark on a project to study the sun. Aiding them will be the world's largest solar telescope — the Rs 300-crore state-of-the-art National Large Solar Telescope (NLST) that will be set up in Ladakh. The aim, say scientists, is also to rekindle interest among students in astronomy.

The NLST with a 2-metre aperture will be prepared and installed in the Pangong lake at Merak village in Ladakh by 2016-17.

"NLST will help scientists carry out cutting-edge research aimed at understanding the fundamental processes taking place on the sun. The core team to build the telescope is already in place and we are just waiting for funds to be allocated to start building the telescope," Siraj Hasan, former IIA director and project head said.

NLST will be a major facility for carrying out solar observation and its unprecedented high spatial resolution will provide crucial information on the nature of magnetic fields in the solar atmosphere. "This project was long due, as we haven't had a project in this line since the 1950s when the solar tunnel telescope was installed in Kozhikode," Hasan added.

The IIA is the nodal agency for the telescope project but various scientific bodies like the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro), Aryabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) and Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) will collaborate in the venture.

"For the past three years we have been doing a lot of background work on the project like detailed concept design, finding a suitable location, preparing reports. Everything is ready for us to take off. Projects like this will inculcate more interest in research among youngsters and attract brilliant minds into astronomy,"