

COMMENTARY

Heed the Warning from Japan : Scrap Jaitapur Nuke Project

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Just over than a month since the partial meltdown of the Fukushima nuclear reactor, Japan is still coping with this disaster, which scientists have officially termed 'at par' with the explosion and meltdown that happened in the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986. The full impacts of this catastrophe are yet to reveal themselves. The tragedy has intensified the resolve of the people of Ratnagiri on the Konkan coast of Maharashtra not to allow the proposed Jaitapur nuclear power plant to come up.

The Congress-NCP Government in Maharashtra and the UPA Government at the Centre have responded to the well-founded apprehensions and opposition of the people with draconian crackdowns and an outright refusal to reconsider the project. The entire area close to the project site has been converted into a virtual police state, dissenting voices have been detained, and protesters have been fired at by the Maharashtra police. Tabrez Sayekar, a resident of the fishing village of Sakhri Nate was killed in the police firing, and eight others injured.

One paper (the *Indian Express*) recently carried an editorial holding the presence of "village posters using Fukushima images to scare villagers about what's in store for them" to be proof that anti-nuclear activists are exploiting the lack of "nuclear literacy" and branding the resistance to the Jaitapur project as a blind 'Luddite' opposition to 'development. What the people of Ratnagiri are expressing is not unreasoning fear and hysteria, stoked by anti-nuke ideologues. They do not need Fukushima posters to 'scare' them. They have watched the tragedy in Japan unfold on their TV screens, and the plight of the people there has struck a chord with them. After all, the Jaitapur project too, like the one at Fukushima, is in a seismic zone on the seashore. They can see that the people of Fukushima too were assured that the reactors were safe from the dangers posed by quakes and tsunamis: but these assurances proved empty when disaster struck. To cap it all, the design given by the French company Areva is untested and questionable. Every man, woman and child in Sakhri Nate and Madban and other affected villages can tell you these facts. It is not their 'illiteracy' that is the problem for the power-that-be - it is their well-founded arguments to which the latter have no answer.

The Jaitapur protests are also being dubbed by the Congress as a political gimmick of the Shiv Sena. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Shiv Sena, as an opposition party, is naturally seeking to fish in the troubled waters of Jaitapur. But the resistance in these villages is not manufactured by the Shiv Sena. In fact the people of the area are fully aware of the Shiv Sena's betrayal on the Enron issue. The people's movement a Jaitapur cannot be ignored further; the nuclear project must be

scrapped.

Fukushima - Wake-Up Call

After Fukushima, which has been a world-wide wake-up call, it is appalling that the UPA is presenting Jaitapur and other new nuclear projects flowing from Indo-US Nuke Deal commitments as a fait accompli to the Indian people, brushing aside the possible risks involved.

The world over, people are forcing governments to rethink their dependence on nuclear energy. Germany for instance has announced a moratorium on its plans to extend the operations of 17 of its existing nuclear plants; a decision has been taken to shut down two of the Germany's oldest nuclear plants. Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel and her Christian Democratic Party have already had to pay for their pro-nuclear stands in the past: the recently concluded regional elections in Germany saw a marked shift in favour of the German Green Party in regions which have traditionally been strongholds of the Christian Democratic Party.

Going against this tide, India, instead, is proposing to increase its dependence on nuclear power. India currently meets less than 1 per cent of its total energy requirements from nuclear energy - and the UPA proposes to meet a whopping 25% of India's total energy demands from nuclear energy by 2032. Nuclear capacity addition across the world has fallen sharply since the late 1980s, despite a huge increase in energy demands. In the past 15 years, the contribution of nuclear energy towards meeting the world's electricity demands has been decreasing, even as the nuclear establishment claims the emergence of a 'nuclear renaissance'.

Given the enormous problems and risks inherent with dependence on nuclear energy, and given the dubious nature of claims of the nuclear establishment (see Box: Exploding the Myths), the case against nuclear energy is very strong. Why then is the UPA so keen on promoting nuclear energy? Why are governments resorting to repression, crackdowns and complete scuttling of voices opposing this myopic promotion of nuclear energy in India?

India's Nuclear Overdrive: 'National' Interest or US-dictated Disaster?

A CAG report clearly shows in the 1990s, the Nuclear Power Corporation was routinely denied the funds demanded to it: for instance, in 1995-96, it required 2032 crores. Out of this requirement, only 214.29 crores was actually allocated to it. This story was repeated year after year in the 1990s. Why did the Indian government wake up suddenly to the miraculous realization that nuclear power was the panacea for India's energy woes?

The reason is clear: the clamour for nuclear energy is not about ensuring 'clean', 'cheap', 'sustainable' energy to millions of Indians. It is, rather, the direct fallout of the India government's overtly pro-US economic and foreign policy. In 2006, as the debate over the Indo-US Nuclear Bill was raging in India, the then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice testified to the House International Relations Committee that the main reasons for the proposed Indo-US nuclear initiative was to deepen Indo-US 'strategic partnership and create opportunities for US business. This is what Rice had to say:

"Civil nuclear cooperation with India will help it meet its rising energy needs without increasing its reliance on unstable foreign sources of oil and gas, such as nearby Iran." In other words, nuclear energy was required only so that India need not get oil from the India-Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline. And that too of course because Iran was an 'unstable' source of oil, according to the US! Rice

continues: "Diversifying India's energy sector will help to alleviate the competition between India, the United States, and other rapidly expanding economies, for scarce carbon-based energy resources." So India was supposed to go for an expensive, unsafe, and unreliable energy option (at a huge risk for the Indian population) only so that the US could safeguard carbon-based resources from further competition! Rice went on: "The initiative will also create opportunities for American jobs, as many as 3,000-5,000 new direct jobs and about 10 to 15,000 indirect jobs as we engage in nuclear commerce with India..Nuclear cooperation will provide a new market for American nuclear firms..."

In December 2010, Jairam Ramesh has spilled the beans about the Jaitapur nuclear project when he pleaded, "I can't stop the project. It is going to come up because it is not just about energy but also about strategic and foreign policy." India is going for this nuclear overdrive at the cost of our sovereign foreign policy, putting the health, lives and livelihoods of millions of Indians at risk.

The recently passed Nuclear Liability Bill too was drafted under direct US pressure. It exempts both the supplier and operator from any compensation in case of damage due to natural disasters such as earthquakes and puts the burden on the public exchequer. So, if a Fukushima were to be repeated in India, the supplier and operator would escape having to pay any compensation whatsoever!

The fears of Jaitapur's people about safety are being pooh-poohed by the nuclear establishment and corporations like Areva. The question arises - if the nuclear industry and corporations are really so sure that their plants are safe and can withstand any quake or tsunami, why are they so insistent on 'caps on liability' and exemptions in case of natural disasters? Why not offer full liability?

The Liability legislation was prepared, ignoring the concerns expressed by the Government's own Ministries before a Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Bill. For instance Secretary for the Ministry of Health Sujata Rao testified before the committee that the health ministry was not consulted while drafting the bill. She warned that because hospitals are not well-equipped "it is natural that mortality and morbidity due to multiple burns, blasts, radiation injuries and psycho-social impact could be on a very high scale and medical tackling of such a large emergency could have enough repercussions in the nearby areas of radioactive fallout." She admitted that her Ministry had no wherewithal to meet such a nuclear emergency.

The Indian Government's claims about nuclear 'safety', 'preparedness' for a nuclear disaster, and nuclear power as essential to meet energy needs are all proving hollow. It is high time the Jaitapur project is scrapped; a moratorium on future nuclear projects announced; a credible and independent review of India's nuclear programme set in motion and the Nuke Liability Bill (which now awaits Presidential assent) be sent back for reconsideration by Parliament.

Radhika Krishnan

Currently, people in Jaitapur, Fatehabad (Haryana), Haripur (W Bengal), Mithivirdi (Gujarat) and elsewhere are fighting a spirited and protracted battle against proposed nuclear power plants in their backyards which will destroy their lives and livelihoods. From 23-25 April, activists from all over the country are holding a yatra from Tarapur to Jaitapur in solidarity with the resistance to the Jaitapur project. AISA National President Sandeep Singh joined a team of activists of the Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) in this yatra.

Exploding Nuclear Myths

- Cheap? Nuclear energy is in fact much more expensive than most other sources of energy. According to A Gopalakrishnan, former chairman of the AERB, the cost of producing electricity at conventional PHWR-based nuclear projects is Rs 8 crore/MWe, compared to Rs 5 crore per MWe at a coal-based power plant. Moreover, the cost of nuclear power has been increasing, as opposed to the falling costs of solar and wind power.
- Perennial and Sustainable? The fact is that even at the present rate of consumption, the world's uranium supplies will last only another 80 years. If the rate of consumption increases by 2-4 times, as projected, there will be no fuel supplies left to power the existing nuclear plants very soon!
- Clean? According to the nuclear establishment, 'clean' nuclear energy is the solution to reduce greenhouse emissions and combat climate change. In fact, nuclear energy is no less harmful in greenhouse gas emissions as compared to coal or gas based electricity generation.
- Safe? From mining of radioactive material, to production of electricity, release of radioactive gases, and disposal of radioactive wastes, the entire cycle of nuclear production necessarily poses multiple safety and environmental hazards over and above any unforeseen accidents that might happen.

We might only remember major accidents like 3-Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima, but the fact of the matter is that several accidents have happened across the world in nuclear power plants. Moreover, the proposed nuclear power plants in India are located in densely populated areas (for instance Fatehabad in Haryana). If there is an accident, it will be virtually impossible to evacuate people. Also, India simply does not have the required health or disaster management infrastructure to deal with a major accident.

** From Liberation monthly of the CPI (ML) Liberation:*

http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2011/may_11/commentary1.html

Protest Continue against Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant

On 23 April 2011, a three-day Tarapur-Jaitapur anti-nuclear plant yatra was stopped the moment it began and hundreds of activists were detained at the Boisar police station. Activists and supporters, including Admiral (retd) L Ramdas, Justices (retd) PB Sawant and BG Kolse Patil, social activist Vaishali Patil and others were whisked away in police vans from Panchmarg Tarapur, where they had addressed a public meeting in the morning. They were brought to the Boisar police station around 4.30 p.m. In all 134 protestors were detained under Section 68 of the Bombay Police Act. It is to be noted that while Uddhav Thackeray is being allowed to visit Jaitapur but not this team of democratic activists!

Comrade Sandeep Singh (AISA National President) and various LNP(L) leaders were also part of the

whole march. Sandeep and some others are still trying to make it to Jaitapur in a dispersed way. On 21 April, several dozen activists including many AISA members and various other groups assembled at Maharashtra Bhawan in New Delhi to protest against Jaitapur plant. On 25th, again a protest at Maharashtra Bhavan was held by various groups including AISA against the arrest of marchers.

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