

India/Koodankulam: Right To Nuclear Information or A Practical Joke?

Tuesday 31 July 2012, by [KAUR Raminder](#) (Date first published: 29 May 2012).

In an unprecedented move, the Right to Information Act (2005) has been used to obtain information from Indian nuclear authorities who have previously held themselves as strictly off-limits. This is in direct response to the Central Information Commission's order in April to release documents that are relevant to public safety concerns.

In a letter dated 18 May, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) released one of the two requested reports, the Site Evaluation Report (SER), to claimant Dr S.P. Udayakumar, the co-ordinator of the People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy in Koodankulam.

The NPCIL denied the public release of the Safety Analysis Report stating that "is a 'third party document' and therefore, without the prior consent of the third party, the same cannot be shared with anyone." The third party is Atomstroyexport and Atomenergoproekt (AEP) of Russia.

The 12 page SER that was released contains some startling information. It demonstrates the backtracking of official declarations that water from the Pechiparai Dam would not be redirected to the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant

The report states : "In order to enhance additional reliability for water supply, which is essential for functioning of various safety systems of the reactor, intake well at Pechiparai Dam should be provided at lower elevation than the minimum draw-down level of the reservoir. However, it should be ensured by proper management of water distribution that the water level is maintained above this minimum level."

Two pipe lines have already been laid from the tail end of the Kuzhithurai Tamirabharani river along the Kanyakumari district coast and from a location about 5 kilometers away from the Pechiparai Dam through Nagercoil town. The Tamil Nadu government has recently allotted nearly Rs. 5 crore to desilt the dam and maintain it.

The report also reveals that the liquid waste from the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant will "be diluted" and "discharged into the sea."

Information on hydrology, geology, oceanography and seismology is reported in a table and without in-depth analysis. Issues such as the tsunami in an area that was ravaged by the 2004 disaster are explained away by saying "Not significant as per preliminary report of CRPPS." As far as the seismotectonic environment is concerned, the report asserts that "No active fault within 5 km. Site is seismic zone II as per IS-1893; 1984."

Relevant issues such as karst in the area, the slumps in the sea and earthquakes in the Indian Ocean as raised by independent experts such as VT Padmanabhan, Dr Ramesh and Dr. Pugazhendhi are not discussed.

On evacuation routes in case of a nuclear emergency, the report states: "3 routes exist for possible evacuation. Schools and other public buildings exist for adequate temporary shelter, Nagercoil

(30km), Tirunelveli (100km), and Tuticorin (100km) can provide communication, medical facilities and administrative support.” There are no further details about the routes, the condition of roads or the preparedness of relief centres.

Most astounding is the use of the name, ‘Soviet Union’, instead of Russia in several places throughout the report. This demonstrates that the report is outdated, probably from before the dissolution of the former USSR in 1991 when plans for the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant were first developed to be put on hold until 2002 when construction began.

Dr S.P. Udayakumar stated that ‘There is hardly any mention of desalinations plants, the transportation of the nuclear waste and other crucial issues. The SER reads like a practical joke being played upon the innocent people of southern Tamil Nadu and southern Kerala. The PMANE rejects this so called SER and demands the NPCIL to share the real, complete and updated Site Evaluation Report with the people of India along with the Safety Analysis Report as per the orders of the Central Information Commission.’

Despite increasing pressure to reveal accurate safety reports, the NPCIL continues with its operations regardless, and has removed dummy assemblies to prepare the first reactor for criticality. They act as if they are above the law which is a frightening predicament for the wellbeing of any democracy.

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P.S.

* 29 May, 2012, Countercurrents.org
<http://www.countercurrents.org/kaur290512.htm>

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