

Talking Nuclear Power

Raising voices against nuclear energy is increasingly seen as a matter of defeatism in the Indian East. It's really disheartening to find very few people who regardless of their partisan politics, stand up for what they believe in at this critical moment. Even for the most unconcerned in eastern India, a nuclear power plant, is no longer a faraway event. For the people of the most populous states of Bengal, Orissa and Jharkhand the proposed nuclear power plant in the densely populated coastal district of East Midnapur in West Bengal, bordering Orissa's missile testing range, is going to be a nightmare. And the ruling leftists of Bengal will go down in history as the worst apologists of multi-national capital as they are determined to have a 'toy' nuclear power house at any cost. What was a rumour, rather a secret mission, about a decade ago is now an open agenda for the left.

Even by western standards, not to speak of Indian standards, nuclear power is more expensive than thermal power, particularly within a 1000-km radius of the pithead. Human tragedy apart, even cost-benefit factor is very much against nuclear energy as revealed by a number of studies both here and abroad : "...the cost of power generation by a coal-fired plant located at the pithead would vary from 14.91 paise to 18.84 paise at 1977-78 for capacity factor varying from 60 to 80 percent" while "comparable figures for the nuclear plant located with recycling of spent fuel ranged between 17.52 paise and 22.08 paise". These ratios of capital costs are for a 200 MW heavy reactor.

Why the department of atomic energy asked the government of West Bengal to look for a proper site for a 1000-MW nuclear plant is, in the first place intriguing. But what is no less intriguing and conspiratorial is the way the marxist government surreptitiously surveyed the area and selected the site hiding the reality that it would evict thousands of small and medium peasants and fisherfolk and destroy whatever remains of ecological balance in the eastern coastal region otherwise vulnerable to so many natural and man-made calamities.

The missile testing range in the adjoining Orissa district of Balasore—it is located at Chandipur—has already destroyed the local agro-economy of the area. Maybe, the entire region would be developed as a closely related system of India's nuclear defence establishment and in that case human catastrophe in the region would be more like a silent holocaust.

Nuclear Power Plant generates costly power and nuclear wastes as well. And defence industry everywhere these days is hellbent to manufacture depleted uranium (DU) weapons from nuclear wastes released by power plants. DU is a cheap toxic waste from nuclear power plants and bomb production that has the capacity to easily smash through tanks, buildings and bunkers spontaneously catching fire and burning people alive. The radio-activity lasts over 4500,000,000 years and causes cancer, leukemia, brain damage, kidney failure and extreme birth defects. Massive use of DU weapons in Iraq by Anglo-

American forces, has turned that country into a living hell where the affected envy the dead. The first DU weapons system was developed for the US Navy in 1968. DU weapons have since been sold by US to 29 countries. The strategic defence partnership covering nuclear cooperation between India and America, which is the talk of the hour, is a symptom of a disease that may be fatal for the people of India.

Tragically enough, anti-nuclear movement is virtually non-existent in this part of the globe. Many on the left think it is not a serious problem. But it is really a major problem for emerging third world economies as nuclear multinationals based in America and Europe desperately need a market for their nuclear industry that has been in crisis for long because of so many nuclear mishaps—the ghost of Chernobyl continues to haunt the West. Established left has joined the band-wagon of nuclear energy advocates because it is an open secret that nuclear business deals involve huge cut money. The far left is yet to rise to the occasion. Spontaneous resistance by the people—the landlosers to be precise—cannot develop into a full-fledged movement. Nor can voluntary organisations deliver the goods in a situation that demands political vision and polarisation as well. ~~///~~