

STOP NUCLEAR MENACE, STOP EVICTION

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On November 28, 2006, around 15000 men, women and children assembled near Junput Bus Stand, which is the gateway to Haripur. The people were from Haripur, Baguran-Jalpai, Saula, Junput, Bichunia, Kadua, Gopalpur, Deshdattabar, Aladarput, Majilapur and other adjacent villages. They had assembled in response to the imminent threat of the construction of a cluster of nuclear power installations in Haripur. The rally was joined by many civil rights groups and activists including the *Paramanu Vidyut Birodhi Andolan*, Paschim-banga. Local MLA Sri Shuvendu Adhikari addressed the rally.

Amidst this massive gathering was created the *Haripur Paramanu Vidyut Prakarpa Pratirodh Andolan*, committed to saving the local people from the looming peril of eviction and radioactive menace.

The movement took off on 17th-18th November, when for two consecutive days thousands of men, women and children from villages around the proposed site blockaded all entry points and vowed to fight till death rather than rotting through generations as evicted refugees or people exposed to nuclear menace. The high power Central team (from NPCIL) that had arrived to inspect the proposed site was compelled to retire and beat a retreat for the moment.

The impending eviction will be of alarming proportions. As the nuclear power plant is proposed to be the largest in India, an area of at least 5 km radius, i.e. of about 80 sq. km, will be cordoned off, leading to eviction of at least 50,000 (fifty thousand) people—fishers, farmers and artisans.

For one thing the area under consideration—Haripur and adjacent villages—is an important source of fish and vegetables, and is indeed described as the ‘fish basket of West Bengal’.

The proposed nuclear power project will spell the doom not only of a vibrant economy but will also result in destroying lives of tens of thousands of people, who will never ever be rehabilitated in the ways of life they have led through generations. Consequence—impoverishment, destitution and inevitable social unrest.

What will be constructed on this graveyard of countless lives is a source of energy that is, to say the least, extraordinarily hazardous. From a nuclear plant of the proposed proportion, hundreds of thousands of gallons of very hot water will be released into the sea leading to thermal shock, and the environment will be routinely exposed to a stream of low-level radiation. The adverse footprints on coastal ecology hardly need elucidation. As there is no safe dose of radiation, the threat posed to all life forms in the adjoining area should be apparent even to the most naive.

Pro-nuclear experts argue that the chances of a major accident are exceedingly low. But unfortunately, the significance of this ‘low probability’ needs to be measured against the magnitude of the peril. A major accident in a thermal power plant may lead to the loss of hundreds of lives, but a major accident in a nuclear plant would be simply catastrophic. Immediate disaster would be followed by lethal doses of radiation persisting for decades and generations. Remember Chernobyl.

And the plant is being proposed on the coast of a bay with a long history of frequent cyclonic and tidal inundations! Tens of thousands of lives were lost in coastal Medinipur in 1942 and in 1970, when the storm-maddened ocean rushed deep inland inflicting terrible destruction. It is sheer insanity to build a nuclear power plant on such a disaster prone coast

after the experience of Tsunami hit Kalapakkam nuclear power plant. The government that is planning the nation's largest power plant is in effect planning for a possible nuclear apocalypse.

And all this tremendous risk for what? For an energy source that is tremendously expensive to erect and run. Nuclear electricity is one of the costliest. (In estimating the cost of nuclear electricity one must take into account the costs of uranium mining and concomitant hazards, costs of transportation of radioactive material and fuel, storage and disposal of radioactive waste and the dismantling of old plants.) Whose interests are being catered to here? The nuclear merchants of the United States who are being given a red carpet welcome through the upcoming Indo-US nuclear pact? ☹

[This is a slightly abridged version of a press statement issued by Sri Debnath on behalf of National Fishworkers' Forum]