

NOTE

SINGUR, NANDIGRAM, HARIPUR...

Madhusudan Pal writes :

These are innocuous village names of rural Bengal. Yet they send shivers down the spines of peasant masses. Reason : CPM-backed police and cadre terror on them. The communists in authority now want land for profiteering and mega projects to be executed by Indian big business and multinationals. Any opposition means bloodshed. While people from Singur through Kolkata to Nandigram are in the midst of virtual civil war, another trouble-spot, perhaps of greater dimension, is brewing at Haripur, near Contai (Kanthi), not far from Nandigram. A nuclear power-plant will be built there soon.

Ironically, when Iran is being denied by the US and the UN agency IAEA of her right to enrich nuclear fuel and the government of India supports the IAEA move, New Delhi is allowed under the recently signed Indo-US nuclear pact to proliferate nuclear energy by enriching nuclear fuel! Ironically also, the CPI(M) shows the Dr Jekyll-face of opposition to Congress Party's Indo-US nuclear pact while in hiding the CPI(M)-led left front government of West Bengal is facilitating land-acquisition for the said nuclear project under Indo-US nuclear pact! This about-to-come nuclear project at Haripur was shrouded in secrecy for a long time. Possibly, the site of the nuclear project at Haripur was selected through satellite images given by some US agencies. About a year ago, a group of men hired a house at lucrative rent near Contai. They began testing soil at various places in the locality. They introduced themselves as technocrats under petroleum ministry of the government of India. People of the locality thought that there was some prospect of oil exploration and co-operated. But somehow they sensed something wrong. They grew suspicious. At last they came to know that the soil was being tested for an imminent nuclear plant. Since most of the people (men-folk) are sea-faring fishermen and are associated with similar fishermen from south 24-Parganas and the Sundarbans, they became aware of the danger surrounding a nuclear plant. They sent their youth force to various science and technology centres who returned home with the information that the first and foremost impact of the about-to-happen nuclear plant shall be the disestablishment unseating and removal of the local people from their age-old normal avocations and habitations, that they will be ousted from their hearth and home as a result of the nuclear plant.

The people of Haripur mustered courage to organise a resistance group. The citizens of Kanthi lent their support. Anti-nuclear Forum and other environmentalists, individuals and organisations, are roped in. One meeting of scientists-technologists-environmentalists was organised at India Association Hall, Kolkata in October, 2006. People of Haripur participated in large number. Expert groups were formed who are now busy educating the people of Kanthi and Haripur about the environmental hazards associated with nuclear plant. On 6 January, 2007 Saturday, a Citizens' Convention was held at Kanthi Birendra Smriti Saudha against the installing of the Nuclear Power Plant at Haripur. The three-tier hall commemorating the great martyr Birendra Sasmal was packed, jam-packed and over filled with people, young and old, men and women, students and teachers, experts and laymen. Pradip Datta of Anti-Nuclear Forum was

the main speaker. He dwelt at length on the comparative cost advantage and environmental benefits of wind-and-solar-energy over nuclear energy. He explained how Uranium is enriched and fuel developed. He explained what happens with water which when discharged spoils life-chain from the smallest plankton to the largest species and kills humans, how radiation is leaked and monitored, what happened at Chernobyl in the erstwhile USSR and the 3-Mile Island in the US and the aftermath, the environmental disaster due to such accidents in nuclear plants, how and why information about accidents in nuclear power plants is kept under secrecy for as long as they are not breached by outside anti-nuclear surveillance agencies, why the nuclear lobby in the US is not installing nuclear power plant on US soil and instead exporting nuclear power plant technology to third world satellite countries like India, how plutonium is reduced and how poisonous plutonium is—plutonium is the worst of poisons and it is man-made and mass-killer. Dr. Subhasis Maity of Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics and Breakthrough Science Society explained other scientific-technical aspects of a nuclear power plant. Chira Dutta, environmentalist, spoke about hazards to environment and encouraged resistance to installing of the nuclear power plant at Haripur. This correspondent also took part in deliberations while emphasising the emptiness of the constitution of India with respect to right to private property in land enabling the government, state or central, to remove people from land at will. More land will be grabbed in near future. *~ ~ ~*