

NOTE

From Tarapur to Jaitapur

B S writes :

With the people of Jaitapur braving renewed police brutalities and government high-handedness, anti-nuclear movement is gaining momentum with every passing day. Last month the National Coordination Committee organised protest march, starting from Tarapur, the site of India's oldest nuclear reactor, to Jaitapur, the nerve centre of current anti-nuclear agitation, to highlight the dangerous fallout of the controversial Jaitapur nuclear power plant, Indians like the Japanese, might have to face possibly, not in the distant future. But the eyeless in New Delhi simply ignore what is happening in Japan's Fukushima.

More than a month after the catastrophic accident at Fukushima, the Japanese nuclear authorities are still struggling to gain control over the damaged reactors. They have now admitted that it would take at least 9 months to cold shut down the reactors. The Japanese government has increased the severity of the accident to the highest level of seven, the same level as that of Chernobyl. The Chernobyl accident seriously contaminated an area as big as Maharashtra, for tens of thousands of years. While four lakh people were evacuated, the many millions who continue to live in this region know that they are forever contaminated, that they could develop cancer anytime, that their children and grand children and great grand children could be born with severe birth defects. Nearly ten lakh people have died so far due to the delayed health effects of the Chernobyl accident, and the number will continue to increase, according to a report published by the US Academy of Sciences in 2010.

The Fukushima accident has forced the Japanese government to evacuate an area of 20 km from the plant, while the US has recommended an 80 km no-go zone to its citizens. Tens of thousands of people are being evacuated; the number could cross a few lakhs. Eventually, if they do go back to their homes after many months, they will go with the knowledge that their environment is contaminated with deathly radiation that would last for tens of thousands of years. Independent European medical experts have estimated that more than 4 lakh people will suffer from cancer in the coming decades in the region 200 km from the reactor. The radioactive contamination from the plant has spread all over the world. In France, pregnant women and children are being asked to avoid consuming products such as milk and vegetables with large leaves, and to be careful when drinking water from reservoirs that collect rain water. Milk samples taken in the US have reported Iodine-131 levels to be 300% higher than permitted. By choosing nuclear power as an energy option, the Japanese leadership has done incalculable harm to the country and the world and the Japanese people are going to pay with their health and the health of their future generations.

The Japanese accident has forced many countries to rethink their nuclear programs. However, the government of India is hell-bent on pursuing its nuclear power expansion program, including setting up a string of nuclear plants all along India's coast. The biggest of these is coming up in the earthquake-prone region of Jaitapur, in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. India's scientists are making the hilarious claim that India's safety standards are better than Japan's and that there is no cause to fear.

The truth is, India's reactors are considered to be the most inefficient and dangerous in the world. And now the government of India is importing reactors from the notorious French corporation Areva for the Jaitapur nuclear plant. These reactors are so dangerous that even pro-nuclear countries like the USA and UK have refused to give design clearance to this

reactor. If there is a major accident at Jaitapur, the entire Ratnagiri district will have to be evacuated, permanently, and entire Western Maharashtra, including Pune and Mumbai would be radioactively contaminated for tens of thousands of years.

The people of Jaitapur area of Konkan are waging a determined struggle against the Areva nuclear plant. The government has unleashed savage repression to crush their struggle. It has resorted to lathi-charges, beatings, indiscriminate arrests, registering of false cases against hundreds of men and women. Leading activists of the area have been issued externment notices from Ratnagiri district. Eminent citizens from the region who have supported the struggle have been barred from entering the district. Then this is the real face of the biggest democracy of the world. □□□