

Wooing Russians

LOCAL PEOPLE ARE OPPOSING construction of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu. People of Ratnagiri in Maharashtra are opposing the Jaitapur nuclear plant. Mamata Banerjee is said to have scrapped the proposed nuclear power plant in Purba Medhinipur. Germany has decided to close all nuclear power plants by 2022. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, however, is determined to push increased generation of nuclear electricity at any cost despite opposition of local people. The not-so-charitable interpretation of PM's stern act is that he wants increased generation to provide benefits to big power companies and to provide electricity to the rich.

Opponents of the Kudankulam project allege that an Environment Impact Assessment has not been done. The project does not have clearance under the Environment Protection Act. There is a provision under the Act for holding a public hearing where local people can voice their grievances and the Government is required to factor these into the decision making process. The local people's voice has been muffled by not holding a public hearing. Professor Shivaji Rao of GITAM University, Vishakhapatnam tells that in the United States it is mandatory to prepare Environmental Assessment Report including Risk Analysis, Nuclear Accident Scenario, Emergency Preparedness Plans and Disaster Management Report before a nuclear project is approved. Why the Prime Minister is not getting these reports prepared and not placing them before the people, he asks.

The Kudankulam plant will use Russian WER 1000 reactors. These have not been used anywhere in the world till now. In other words, the Prime Minister has converted the project into a testing laboratory for the Russian nuclear equipment supplier.

India has recently enacted the Nuclear Liability Act. Under the act, the supplier of the nuclear machines has to bear a part of the damages in case of an accident. However, the Russian supplier says that it is not covered under this Act. The entire liability in case of an accident will have to be borne by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India which is building the project. Russia insists that it is supplying the machines under the Inter-Governmental Agreement signed in 2008 by the Indian and Russian governments and which does not provide for the Russian supplier bearing part of the accident costs. The PM should explain why the earlier agreement should not be revisited and aligned with the Act promulgated subsequently by the Parliament? Also he should explain why the agreement has not been placed in the public domain.

Industries which consume the electricity also produce most goods for the rich. The cars produced in the automobile units of Chennai are mostly used by the rich while the damage to

fishes in the sea from the discharge of hot water is borne by the poor. The PM's policy of increased generation of electricity is, therefore, anti-people by any standard.

There is a story in the Mahabharata. It is asked, to whom does the cow belong? Reply is given that it does not belong to the herdsman who takes the cow for grazing, it does not belong to the farmer who owns the cow, it does not belong to the milkman who carries the milk to the city, it belongs to the person who actually drinks the milk.

It is true that countries like China are destroying their environment and selling goods cheap in the world. One way to face this challenge is to destroy India's environment and produce cheap goods. Other way is to impose an 'environment tax' on imports from China. India should follow the latter, not the bad policies of China. The Government of India should reconsider its approach of 'electricity at any cost'. People should push only those projects where benefits to the poor are much greater than the costs. That is not so at Kudankulam or Jaitapur. □□□