

SELLING LIES

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PRIME MINISTER MANMOHAN Singh, onboard his trip to Russia where he assured his hosts for early start-up of the Koodankulam reactor, said in December that the government has gone “out of its way” to take people into confidence.

For a reality-check, here is a quick re-capitulation of issues that the debate on Koodankulam has highlighted:

Koodankulam is unsafe despite the government calling it the ‘safest in the world’.

Cooling is a major issue with nuclear reactors. Not only the desalination plants that are supposed to supply cooling water to the reactors are insufficient and vulnerable, but they are also of a new design and in case of any accident, would have to wait for experts from Israel’s supplier to come. This is a gross violation of AERB’s instruction in 1989 during its clearance for KKNPP, where it had mandated at least two water sources. The EIA clearance for Koodankulam was obtained in 1998 by promising water intake from Pechiparai, 65 km south west of the site. The AERB then had instructed the NPCIL to additionally arrange for water from Upper Kodayar reservoir. But today, KKNPP is perhaps the only reactor in the world that depends on desalination plants for its water supply!

There is dubious limestone mining near the Koodankulam site. NPCIL has leased 2.2 sq km of the land out of the total 10 sq.km. of Koodankulam site area to a mining company. While the Central Govt’s Expert Committee, appointed to ‘allay peoples’ fears’, claimed in November that the NPCIL does not carry any mining activities, the EIA reports prepared by NEERI for Koodankulam does talk about limestone mining. While the NPCIL itself at one place accepted it was an ‘excavation’ for construction of a dam with a capacity to store 60,000 cubic meters of water to be piped from Pechiparai, it has no answers why the dam is still not built and why then the reactors are dependent on desalination plants for water supply.

The govt experts have been bragging about third-generation safety features and the passive heat removal (PHRS) system. PHRS is not really ‘passive’ as it does need external source of power. Moreover, these systems are based on simulation and not tested in real time.

The People’s Expert Committee’s report on Koodankulam has highlighted several other the vulnerabilities: the un-counted people in the Sterilization zone, routine releases through stack, Station Black Out beyond 10 days due to Space Weather Anomalies, effects on marine biology etc.

The maximum temperature of sea water during the summer of 2003 was 30° C according to NEERI as per the study of the Physicochemical Characteristics of Marine Water during 2003. In the presentation of the Gol's Expert Group, the maximum temperature is down from 30 C° to 29° C. This fact is important because Koodankulam the discharge of 7.2 billion liters of hot water into the sea every day from every reactor at Koodankulam would increase the temperature of sea water and destroy the fisheries.

The Gol's Expert Group has held nuclear liability issues beyond its purview. Even the very limited liability provisions under the Nuclear Liability Act are not acceptable to Russian companies in case of Koodankulam and they cite the 2008 agreement in their favour. Nuclear liability was a key reason why the agreement for Koodankulam reactor 3&4 could not be clinched during the PM's recent visit to Russia.

Koodankulam will not provide 1000 MWs of electricity to Tamil Nadu.

Not only has the central government falsely claimed that the KKNPP will generate additional 1000 MWs for Tamil Nadu, it has also misled the state's industrial associations into believing that the KKNPP is the 'only ray of hope' for their power-starved production units. In reality, the Koodankulam Reactors I and II will not be able to supply more than 405 MWs at best. Nuclear power plants run on a typically low capacity factor. India's nuclear reactors actually produced only 50% of their installed capacity in 2008-09. Although this has gone in recent years, the average capacity factor on a longer time scale remains low worldwide for the nuclear industry for a variety of reasons. Then, there are huge transmission and other losses due to which the actual electricity at the consumer's disposal is even lower.

In Comparison, wind power already produces 4,790 MWs in Tamil Nadu. Just replacing all incandescent lamps in by CFLs in the state would save 500 MWs of electricity!

The people's non-violent struggle must be defended

Even when the dialogue on Koodankulam's safety was on, the government kept putting newer police charges on non-violent protesters and activists, including those of sedition and war against the state. M. Pushparayan has been engaging in the official dialogue as the movement's representative. He says in a recent interview : "we demanded some important document, information and white papers from the govt that would enable us for an informed and open engagement. But the government refused to provide us these documents, which do not really contain any sensitive data or information...this is no way to engage people into dialogue."

Pushparayan adds further: "Now that even the mischievous attempts to malign the movement for being 'foreign-funded' and church-dominated have fallen flat due to sustained struggle of people in large numbers, people have apprehensions that the government might resort to naked violence and state-repression."

Koodankulam has raised some important questions for Indian democracy and the growth-driven development dreams. The larger society must stand in support of the masses struggling for a nonviolent, equitable and sustainable India. □□□

[source : <http://www.dianuke.org>]