

Realities Are Bitter

It's a good diversion—Indo-US civilian nuclear deal or what they emphatically called "Agreement 123". People are more concerned at the moment about ever rising prices of essential commodities, not the nuclear fuss. Opposition parties, both left and right, are yet to make a concrete case out of the Indo-US nuclear deal. Mere agit-propoganda about the vague notion of sovereignty which India has virtually mortgaged to America, and overenthusiasm to play with the gallery to dodge the real issues cannot wash. While the Bharatiya Janata Party, otherwise jingoist in its approach to sub-continental power equation, is not opposed to the deal in principle, the left too would be satisfied in due season if the prime minister assures the house that India's sovereignty won't be compromised. Also, their too much noise about joint naval exercise with America in the Bay of Bengal next month is just routine—it is more like fire without smoke.

Being a partner of America's global strategic enterprise, New Delhi has very little option in opposing US foreign policy orientation that aims at reaffirming through every possible means, American hegemony in world affairs. Political parties in India cannot say 'no to nukes', they are debating over 'clauses and sub-clauses' as stipulated in the controversial agreement.

As almost all political parties remained pre-occupied with American Hyde Act and different niceties of Indo-US nuclear deal, Hiroshima Day this year simply came and went without creating any impact on the peace movement otherwise weak in this part of the globe. True, 'Remembering Hiroshima' is a ritual as anything else. Yet August 6 matters for those who are opposed to nuclear bomb and nuclear power as well. And civilian nuclear deal is all about 'energy'. So they say. 'Atom for Peace', rather atomic energy's peaceful use, is a myth. What is being ignored in the raging nuclear debate is India's ambitious plan to generate 200 GW nuclear power by 2050. In other words American nuclear industry, otherwise facing worst slump, has every reason to thank Bush and Manmohan Singh for opening multi-billion business prospects.

But nuclear power is a risky business though even advocates of green movement see nuclear power as a solution to the impending energy crisis in view of uncontrolled global warming.

The dream that nuclear power would turn atomic fission into a force for good rather than destruction unraveled with the Three Mile Island disaster in 1979 and the Chernobyl melt-down in 1986. No US utility has ordered a new nuclear plant since 1979. Maybe, the Karats and Advanis are not opposing importing American reactors to save the ailing nuclear industry in US. Rising oil prices and horrific scenario emanating from global warming have surely put the nuclear industry back on the track. Ironically, Japan, the worst victim of atomic radiation, is the most enthusiastic votary of nuclear power. But a recent accident, mainly due to earthquake, in one of Japan's nuclear power plants, which incidentally is the world's biggest nuclear power plant, has caused tremendous radiation pollution, releasing radioactive elements into the air and ocean and an indefinite shutdown. Nuclear bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, killed an estimated 80,000 people while destroying more than 65 percent of the city's buildings

completely in seconds. Everybody knows nuclear power is the smoke-screen, utilised by all big powers and small powers, to build nuclear bombs.

Not that there is no alternative to nuclear power. There are clearer, cheaper, faster alternatives that may be tried with less money and none of the risks. The economic cost of building nuclear power plants in a third world country like India and an endless debate over what to do with the waste ensure that ramping up the nuclear infrastructure will be a slow process—far too slow to make a difference on global warming. America despite its advanced technology is not in a position to guarantee safety at its nuclear power sites. The Union of Concerned Scientists cites 51 cases at US nuclear power plants in which reactors have been shut down for more than a year as evidence of serious and all pervading safety problems. The accelerating threat of global warming demands alternative sources of energy other than nuclear power. A combination of energy efficiency measures, renewable and non-conventional power like wind and solar and decentralised power generations are already producing more energy worldwide than nuclear power plants. 'On average coal plants operate at 30 percent efficiency worldwide but newer plants operate at 46 percent. If the world average could be raised to 42 percent it would save the same amount of carbon in building 500 nuclear power plants'. Yet India's left and right are too eager to go ahead with the disastrous idea of enhancing nuclear power potential. Their duel over "123" does not tell the truth because truth hurts. □□□