

Koodankulam: A struggle we must support

The Struggle

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Thousands of women and children have been part of this 25-years long struggle. 15,000 people participated in the first demonstration in 1989, upon which the police opened indiscriminate fire, injuring several men and women.

After Fukushima, the agitation became strong. In August, 125 people sat on a 12-day long hunger strike, forcing the govt to halt work and start dialogue.

However, the govt has even denied sharing related information and holding open dialogue. Instead, the protesting people have been charged with fictitious cases of sedition and war against the state. Police cases have been slapped against 55, 795 people. Passports and ration-cards have been cancelled. The recent report by Justice A P Shah, former Chief Justice of the Madras High Court has come down heavily on these brazen human-rights violations. Even today, prohibitory orders around in the areas surrounding the reactors are imposed and activists fear imminent arrests.

Do we need nuclear energy at the cost of people's lives?

“The debate on India’s energy future is far from settled. We will need broader consensus and greater persuasion to ensure that India opts for the safest, most sustainable people-centric energy future.

The reactor project in Koodankulam perpetrates too many unacceptable violations of norms and procedures. The agitating people are peacefully and persistently trying to raise several important questions – both site-specific and generic with regard to nuclear power – through all possible forums. Many independent experts and scientists have already emphasized the various dangers of going ahead with the Koodankulam reactors.

At this critical juncture, we urge realizing a wider consultation is necessary before continuing the large-scale nuclear expansion that this government is already deeply engaged in.”

(Excerpts from the national appeal on Koodankulam, endorsed by eminent citizens like Prashant Bhushan, Medha Patkar, Vandana Shiva, Aruna Roy, Binayak Sen, Vandana Shiva, Lalita Ramdas, Partha Chatterjee, Praful Bidwai, Gnani Sankaran etc. The appeal is open for signatures on DiaNuke.org)

Koodankulam:

Support a besieged community's struggle



In the Tirunelveli district of southern Tamil Nadu, fisherfolk and farmers opposing the Koodankulam nuclear power plant are facing police harassment, political apathy while their lives, safety, livelihood and natural surroundings remain under threat.

Despite fierce local protests, objections of independent experts and the global trend of nuclear phase-out, the government is pushing ahead with commissioning of the nuclear reactors.

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Its about lives, livelihoods, environment and democracy. Its about women, children, the sea, the beaches, birds and trees.

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The Reactor Project

Koodankulam nuclear power project (KKNPP) is based on Russian technology.

Initiated in 1988 under the then Soviet Russia, this project has faced opposition since the beginning. The project got delayed by a decade due to dissolution of the USSR.

While Russia's own post-Fukushima safety audit has put serious questions before safety of its reactors, the Indian govt and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) continue to claim that its most advanced and safest in the world. Russia has also denied paying any compensation as a supplier in case of an accident.

Citing the delays in the project and other technical issues, the independent experts have demanded a fresh safety evaluation of the reactor, but the NPCIL has refused to make the existing safety record public despite several RTIs and order by the Central Information Commission (CIC) itself.



Fishermen protest in front of the reactor on the World Fisheries Day, November 20, 2011

The Objections:

Problems with KKNPP:

Several independent scientists, including the 24-member expert committee have raised some serious objections on the Koodankulam reactor project. The main technical objections involve:

- 1) Inadequate water availability in Koodankulam, a basic requirement for reactors in normal operation and more so in case of accidents.
- 2) Geological vulnerabilities of the site, including volcanism and tsunami-proneness
- 3) Illegal lime-stone mining within the sterilization zone of the reactor, making the ground unstable.

Nuclear Energy is not the solution

After Fukushima, there is a trend of shifting to renewable energy sources world over. However, our govt pursuing this dangerous and anachronistic path for misleading notions of energy security and interests of global nuclear corporations.

Nuclear energy is climate-unfriendly, unaffordable, inherently unsafe and undemocratic technology.

The authorities have nothing more than hollow assurances and denials for the hidden costs and subsidies, the perpetual problem of nuclear waste, the undeniable hazards of radiation, and its impact on people's health and life.

The objections to the KKNPP are mainly of 3 kinds: site-specific, pertaining to the generic problems inherent in nuclear energy, and the dangers of pursuing nuclear energy expansion in India within an unaccountable, non-transparent, undemocratic and hence unsafe system.

Impact on the surrounding population and environment

Koodankulam is a fisherfolk-dominated area and the local community is apprehensive of losing their livelihoods. Water discharge from nuclear reactors raises the temperature of the sea typically by 5°C, which will result in loss of fish-catch. The enhanced security apparatus around the reactor area would also prevent the fishermen from entering the sea. The fishermen in Koodankulam area have also seen the plight of their friends near the Kalpakkam reactors in Tamil Nadu, where the fish-catch has gone down and radioactive contamination in the fishes and the environment has ruined the livelihood, health and lives.

The people's request for a transparent environmental clearance has been refused by the NPCIL and the government on flimsy ground: the reactor was sanctioned in 1980s and then projects like this did not require clearances, so its okay!

Women in Koodankulam are particularly enraged because nuclear radiation remains dangerous for hundreds of years and causes genetic mutations and renders women infertile. Substances like Iodine 131, Cesium, strontium, tritium, tellurium, are routinely released from reactors and contaminate our air, land, crops, cattle, sea, seafood and ground water.

Its about a world that we are destroying for our mad rush to 'development'. Its about saving our democracy, undermined by the DAE.