



Press Release: Freeze Nuclear Plants, Democratise Decision making on Nuclear Energy

New Delhi, 8 December 2011: The New Trade Union Initiative supports the day long National Anti-Nuclear protest demonstration being held today at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi in solidarity with the people's struggle against unsafe and costly nuclear power projects and the un-democratic process adopted by the government in making decisions on nuclear energy and on nuclear power projects across India.

Unsafe Technology: The present generation of technology used for the production of energy in the existing and proposed nuclear power plants is unsafe. While nuclear accidents have large-scale and long-term consequences, even normal operation of reactors expose workers and local populations to radiations that can cause diseases such as cancer, thyroid dysfunctions and leukaemia in the long-term. Further, dealing with nuclear waste is still an issue with no known solution and substances like plutonium, created as by-product, remain dangerously radioactive for thousands of years, creating an inherent long term risk. The NTUI condemns the policymakers, technocrats and the scientific lobby propped up by corporate interest in promoting a technology that is inherently unsafe guided by nuclear armament need in complete disregard of the consequences on local populations and workers engaged in the sites.

Costly Energy: The expansion of India's nuclear power capacity will put a heavy burden on the Indian exchequer as not only is nuclear power expensive, but the industry has a track record to run into large overhead costs. According to an independent estimate, overhead costs of nuclear power plants, between 1995 and 2000, have increased in the range of 176% to 396%. Also, the government intends to limit liability of the operator and exonerate the design, technology equipment suppliers for any of its actions and hence in case of any accident the financial burden will fall on the people in addition to the catastrophic effect. Hence the argument of nuclear energy being cost-effective falls through.

Renewable vs Non-renewable: With dwindling coal reserves complemented with environmental and health hazards accompanying it and the growing energy requirement in the economy, there is an urgent need for the development of a renewable, sustainable and affordable energy base. India already has more energy coming from renewable sources than from nuclear plants by a factor of 4, albeit still a small 10% of the total installed generation capacity in 2010. This is despite budget allocations being much more for nuclear energy. The Department of Atomic Energy's overall budget estimates for 2011-12 was Rs. 18,481 crore, while the budget estimate of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy was only Rs. 1,212 crore in 2011-12. There has also been a cheapening of the renewable energy technology that makes the expansion of the use of this source more affordable and sustainable. The NTUI believes that India's basic energy needs can be met with renewable sources and calls for the promotion of people centred non conventional and sustainable energy sources. The NTUI believes that this can be achieved through principles of democratic industrialisation that includes the restructuring and decentralisation of the national electricity grid so as to ensure sufficient supply of energy to essential industries and services and to people.

Democratising Decision: People living close to nuclear power plants and uranium mines have raised serious concerns regarding the direct and indirect health hazards, loss of their livelihoods, the technology choices made, the impacts on fragile ecosystems, as well as risks related to the seismic nature of proposed locations, among other legitimate and serious concerns. It is the responsibility of a democratically elected government to respond to these concerns. But, instead of ensuring a democratic and transparent process for addressing these concerns within an accountability framework, people's right to dissent is met with brutal state repression. The NTUI demands a freeze of nuclear projects based on a precautionary principle until a comprehensive review of nuclear policy and practice and an independent safety audit of existing nuclear power plants is undertaken and the findings be shared widely so as to ensure informed public debate. We therefore also strongly demand that any nuclear power generation programme in the country should have as a pre-condition, the formation of a Nuclear Safety Commission that is independently constituted to cover all nuclear power establishments with powers to enforce information disclosures, frame safety rules, risk assessment methodologies and protocols, periodic risk assessment report and safety audit and put it all in public domain. It should have powers to give safety directives including shut down of plants. The commission should include, beside credible independent experts, elected representatives of workers, scientists and professionals working in the industry and all other stakeholders of affected communities.

The NTUI stands in solidarity with the people of Koodankulam - Tamil Nadu, Jaitapur - Maharashtra, Chutka - Madhya Pradesh, Mithi Viridi - Gujarat, Gorakhpur - Haryana and Kovada - Andhra Pradesh and demand a freeze on these projects until a transparent, informed, and participatory decision making process is established.

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