

India's Nuclear Fantasy

Us secretary of State Mrs Hillary Clinton came all the way from Washington to New Delhi to locate two nuclear parks and she got them in no time as Manmohan Singh's government was too eager to oblige her. By agreeing to get completely integrated with the American defence system Indian leaders enjoyed the moment and derived comfort from the fact that they would be able to have extra importance in America's strategic calculations in south Asian region. The power-brokers look happy that both sides have agreed on the end-use monitoring arrangements that will facilitate quick procurement of defence equipment and technologies. In plain language the controversial Indo-American nuclear deal is taking full circle. Surprisingly, the left's reaction to the Clinton mission was too feeble to be heard beyond parliament. But they withdrew support from the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government on the nuclear deal issue, accusing the architects of the agreement of surrendering India's sovereignty to America. And now when the agreement is being implemented step by step, they just finish their anti-imperialist, rather anti-American stance by staging walk-out in both houses of parliament. In reality this understanding which is called 'End-User Monitoring Agreement' is part of the enhanced Defence Cooperation Framework Agreement of 2005.

By accepting America's intrusiveness into India's defence system, India has virtually compromised on sovereignty. Foreign Minister S M Krishna's statement about 'EUMA' hid more than what it revealed and failed to address Opposition members' concerns. But Opposition members' concerns ended in shouting 'shame, shame'.

That America's grip over India's fragile economy and troubled polity is tightening dangerously is a fact of life. No doubt the collapse of Soviet Union has hastened the process of cementing India's strategic partnership with America but cooperation in the defence sector started way back in the 1960s, more precisely at the time of India-China border war. The authorities of New Delhi had no option but to open India's defence establishment to American defence strategists to some extent as a pre-condition to have "military aid" to counter communist threat from China.

The left never seriously opposed American penetration in India. Nor are they interested now in fighting Indo-American nuclear deal with all seriousness. As they are not against New Delhi's efforts to elbow its way into the exclusive club of nuclear powers, they cannot really fight the American menace. Also, they are the fanatic champions of nuclear energy for which the notorious deal, ostensibly, has been conceived, as per official stand.

Because of the left's reluctance to see danger in atomic power and weapons, anti-nuclear movement has all along been a weak area of mass agitation by some NGOs with little resources and manpower to influence public opinion.

Marxists in Bengal are too willing to have a nuclear reactor at Haripur, a small village of fisherfolk in coastal Midnapore. Their entire plan to erect a nuclear power plant at Haripur, evicting thousands of poor villagers while ignoring disastrous ecological consequences was a secret till the other day. The people of

the locality came to know it at a stage when the situation was really desperate. In the face of stiff resistance by the local people, mostly fishermen, the left government had to retreat for the time being without really scrapping the project.

Meanwhile, fishermen across the nation saw a ray of hope in the Centre's decision to frame a 'reformed and scientific version' of the Draft Coastal Management Zone 2008 which would be allowed to lapse. The lives and livelihoods of nearly 25 percent of Indian population living within 50 km of the shoreline, depend on coastal resources and bio-diversity. The government seems to be weighing alternate options instead of sticking to earlier plan to set up a chain of nuclear reactors along India's eastern coastline. The sea-level rise because of global warming and drastic climate change associated with it, may have forced the union environment and forest ministry to have second thoughts on the location of nuclear reactors. Incidentally fishermen's movement is led by a mass platform having no allegiance to any political party.

Anti-nuclear struggle has many a dimension. Unless it starts at the root—uranium mining—an all encompassing anti-nuclear movement cannot develop in depth and breadth. A resurgence of interest in building nuclear power plants, touted as a non-polluting alternative to carbon-fuelled plants has sparked a global uranium rush. Nearer home how uranium mining in Jharkhand's Jadugoda has despoiled the lands and health of local tribals is now an international concern. Jadugoda is all set to witness a second phase of extended mining though the first phase has left a dangerous toxic legacy to the people of the area. Right now the people of Nalgonda and Tummalapalle in Andhra Pradesh are opposing uranium mining.

What is at stake is the safety of current and future generations. Mere murmur in parliament about Indo-American nuclear deal which will immediately salvage the ailing nuclear industry of America and Europe from bankruptcy cannot even gauge the gravity of the problem. □