

Mettur-Cuddalore Anti-PVC Factory March Committee

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Press Release

Mettur Villagers Launch 285 km Walk to Cuddalore to Campaign Against Chemplast Sanmar's Proposed PVC factory

Chennai, Salem, Cuddalore, 1 September 2005: Starting 3 September, 2005, Mettur residents will march 300 km from Mettur to Cuddalore rallying residents en route in support of a call to prevent Mettur polluter Chemplast Sanmar from setting up a controversial and dangerous PVC factory in SIPCOT Industrial Estate, Cuddalore. This 1,40,000 tonnes per annum capacity facility will consume groundwater at the rate of 1,20,000 litres per hour and use a highly explosive raw material, Vinyl Chloride Monomer (VCM), which is also known to cause cancer.

Existing Chemplast factories in Mettur have laid waste more than 2000 acres of agricultural land, polluted groundwater with toxic chemicals, and contributed to widespread ill-health among its workers and communities. An air sample taken above Chemplast's foul-smelling effluent outfall into the Kaveri revealed high levels of cancer-causing chemicals, including Ethylene Di Chloride (a known carcinogen) at 32,000 times above safe levels. "We have been poisoned by Chemplast for the past 50 years and we do not want anybody else to experience a similar fate. We empathise with the people of Cuddalore, who have also been at the receiving end of pollution. Since the Government doesn't care and will not warn them, we've decided to take to Cuddalore the story of how Chemplast has treated us, our lands and water," West Konur Farmers Welfare Organisation, the lead organiser said.

In early 2005, the Tamilnadu Government secretly cleared Chemplast's proposal for a PVC factory in Cuddalore despite the fact that the plant had failed to get approval from two states in the last three years. In 2002, SIPCOT residents rejected the proposal at a Government-held public hearing. After Chemplast failed to get Tamilnadu Government's approval due to public opposition, it took the proposal to the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh. Villagers from Krishanapatnam, the project site, visited Mettur to assess the company's environmental and social performance. Upon their return, all political parties, panchayats and villagers unanimously rejected Chemplast's proposal once again.

Tamilnadu Government's clearance is highly irregular, especially given that they have chosen to clear a twice-rejected project based on 1999 submissions and without public consultation. The location of the proposed project is in close proximity to Pandian Chemicals that manufactures rocket fuel thus jeopardising the safety of the entire zone in an event of an accident. The Chemplast proposal sounds the death knell for the Cuddalore villages who are already reeling under the effects of pollution caused by the existing industries.

The participants of the walk will also reach out to other pollution impacted communities en route and highlight the inability of the government in protecting the lives and environment of the people. Supporting organisations for the walk are: West Konur Farmers Welfare Association, SEED, SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors, FEDCOT, Tamilnadu Green Movement, Tamilnadu Environment Council, Corporate Accountability Desk

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