

Mettur-Cuddalore Anti-PVC Factory March Committee

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Anti-PVC march rescheduled. Organisers allege Police-Industry Nexus

CHENNAI. 9 SEPTEMBER, 2005 -- Organisers of an anti-PVC plastic march from Mettur to Cuddalore were forced to reschedule their march due to a last minute refusal by Salem police who were acting at the behest of Chemplast Sanmar, a Mettur-based PVC manufacturer. The West Konur Farmers Welfare Association from Mettur was to lead a 285 kilometre awareness march to SIPCOT Cuddalore where Chemplast proposes to set up a 140,000 tonne/year PVC plant.

Barely two days before the march was to begin on 3 September, the Mettur police denied permission to start the march or take it through Salem district on grounds that processions were not allowed because of Ganesh Chaturthi. However, the organisers moved the Madras High Court and secured their right to walk through areas such as Salem city where permission had already been obtained. As per the Court order, the march was rescheduled to begin on 5 September from Salem. But, in what appears to be a hasty decision to prevent the march from starting at any cost, the Salem police revoked permit for the march in direct violation of the High Court order.

Strangely, Salem police's letter mentions that its revocation is based on a decision by the Madras High Court to ban the march considering its anti-labour nature. The High Court has issued no such direction. This indicates that the police's orders may have been prompted by information and considerations that may not be entirely official. Organisers have brought the violation to the notice of the High Court and are requesting it to enquire into possible complicity between the administration and the company.

"We have suffered for several decades due to Chemplast's pollution, and we can tell you that the Government or the police will not come to your aid once the factory is set up. That is why we feel it is our duty to warn the residents of Cuddalore about the dangers of PVC pollution and also tell them about Chemplast's track record of environmental and human rights violations in Mettur. We are not seeking closure of Chemplast in Mettur. We want the factory to operate without endangering its workers and the community. But we're certain that we don't want this polluter to endanger a new community in Cuddalore," the Farmers' Association said. GAIA, a global network of more than 500 organisations from 77 countries has lent its solidarity to the anti-PVC march.

The Chemplast PVC proposal was first rejected by the SIPCOT residents in 2002. Subsequently, the proposal was moved to Krishnapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. In 2003, Krishnapatnam villagers unanimously rejected the project. The twice-rejected project has now been re-invited by the Tamilnadu Government amidst much controversy and allegations of irregularities.

Decision on the proposal which has been pending environmental clearance from the Union Ministry of Environment has been twice postponed because of the massive public opposition and the numerous technical irregularities in the proposal.

Organisers of the anti-PVC march include: West Konur Farmers Welfare Association, Thanthai Periyar Dravida Kazhagam, SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors, FEDCOT, SEED, DEPORT, Tamilnadu Environmental Council, Tamilnadu Green Movement, Corporate Accountability Desk.

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