

PRESS RELEASE

Activists Allege Fraud in 4000MW Cheyyur Project

19 AUGUST, 2013, CHENNAI – Cheyyur residents and city-based environmentalists plan to file criminal complaints of fraud against people involved in justifying the siting and approvals of the 4000 MW Cheyyur Ultra Mega Power Plant. Their complaints will be based on a report documenting a dozen “chosen” fraudulent statements used by project consultants, the proponent and regulators in justifying port licensing and environmental clearances in Cheyyur, Kanchipuram district. More than 15 prominent people, including former National Knowledge Commission vice-chairman Dr. P.M. Bhargava, former Government of India Energy Secretary E.A.S. Sarma, columnist Praful Bidwai, anti-corruption crusader Adv. Prashant Bhushan, Prof. M. Arunachalam, who heads MS University's Centre for Environmental Sciences, have endorsed the report and sent a letter to Central and State Governments urging them to scrap the project because of the fraudulent basis of its siting and regulatory approvals. The report titled “Science, Non-Science and the Dubious Role of “Experts” in Environmental Due Diligence: A case study of Cheyyur UMPP” was prepared by Chennai-based Community Environmental Monitoring program.

The project site is located between the biologically productive Mudaliarkuppam and Alhambrai estuaries, and is surrounded by *eris* or irrigation tanks, some of which date back to the 8th Century AD. More than 80 percent of the land to be acquired for the power plant and ash dump is agricultural, while a 300,000 tonne coal stocking yard is proposed barely 200 metres from the sea on top of a sand dune. To obtain clearances, project consultants – NIOT and WAPCOS – and the Government of India-owned promoter Power Finance Corporation have claimed that the project is coming up on barren, undeveloped land with minimum agriculture, and denied the presence of ecosensitive features like mangroves, sand dunes, estuaries or scarce resources like surface or groundwater in the area. According to Tamil Nadu Public Works Department, Cheyyur taluk has 82 lakes (*eris*) capable of storing 3500 crore litres of water and irrigating more than 16,000 acres.

Residents of Panaiyur Periakuppam and Community Environmental Monitoring said they will file criminal complaints for fraud and falsification of evidence against the project proponent, its consultants NIOT and WAPCOS, members of the Expert Appraisal Committees of the Union Environment Ministry and regulatory officials including from the Tamil Nadu Maritime Board and the State Coastal Zone Management Authority.

“The Maritime Board has claimed that our beach was chosen by a site selection committee on the basis that it was unused and empty, and that the coastline is stable. Both are false statements that will play havoc with our lives, and we will hold the Board officials that made this statement accountable,” said M. Marimuthu, a Periakuppam fisherman who has filed a case against the project in the National Green Tribunal. Belying the project proponent's claims, a 38 year study by the Ministry of Environment & Forests concludes that the Panaiyur coastline is prone to erosion.

The report was released in the presence of Prof. S. Janakarajan, Madras Institute of Development Studies, and Dr. Nanditha Krishna of CPR Environmental Education Centre. Highlighting the presence of the biodiverse lagoons, abundant fresh water and scarce resources such as medicinal plants, the speakers said Cheyyur is a natural heritage that ought to be preserved in the interests of our food and water security.

Residents and environmentalists point out that the fraudulent statements used to justify siting the project at its present location could be disastrous. Emissions, including of neurotoxins like mercury, from the plant could contaminate the waterbodies and food and fish from the region. The proposed constructions will also disturb the sand dunes in the area, while the captive coal jetty will erode the beach. Shore erosion, and disturbance of sand dunes will make the region's population and agriculture more vulnerable to cyclonic storms, and accelerate salinity intrusion into the groundwater.

For more information, contact:

Residents and Panchayat of Panaiyur Periakuppam. M. Marimuthu: 9566375673
Community Environmental Monitoring program. Shweta Narayan: 8056024315