

[News](#) » [National](#)

Jaitapur protest misconceived, we are ready to address fears: AEC chief

Staff Reporter

Very little cultivable land identified for acquisition

The protest against land acquisition at Jaitapur in Maharashtra, where a nuclear power plant is to come up, is misconceived, Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Srikumar Banerjee said on Saturday.

Issues often got mixed up. There were three sections of protesters — those demanding higher compensation for land, those who had fears over nuclear safety and the anti-nuclear lobby.

The nuclear establishment was willing to engage each of these sections and address apprehensions. “We are ready to take people into confidence and have no idea of bulldozing the issue. We are also ready to talk directly to the people,” Dr. Banerjee said, talking to presspersons after his convocation address at the Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham deemed university here.

In Jaitapur, there would be very little or rather no displacement. For only very little cultivable land had been identified for acquisition. The Maharashtra government, on behalf of the atomic energy establishment, had classified the land into “not cultivated,” “rarely cultivated” and “cultivated,” and the compensation package was prepared accordingly.

Listing safety measures taken in India post-Fukushima disaster (in Japan), Dr. Banerjee said the nuclear establishment identified and established hook-up points for the water cooling system to bring down decay heat (the residual heat after the plant is shutdown), put in place mechanisms to prevent the heat from entering the turbine, and planned to fill up nitrogen to prevent accumulation of hydrogen and thereby a mix-up of hydrogen and oxygen. One of the reasons for the Fukushima disaster was steam mixing up with zirconium because of fuel failure.

It was decided to have multiple sources for power and water to ensure that nothing happened to nuclear plants in the event of a disaster.

Dr. Banerjee, who is also the Secretary of the Department of Atomic Energy, said the country would soon have a Nuclear Safety Regulatory Authority.

It would be a statutory body and all nuclear projects would need to have its approval.

In projects involving foreign collaboration, partners should have the approval of the regulatory authority of their home country.

Dr. Banerjee said it was planned to start 10 nuclear parks across the country based on a cluster approach. Each park would have more than one reactor.

The cluster approach would reduce the need for land, both for establishment of plants and the exclusion zone.

On the Kudankulam plants, Dr. Banerjee said one of the two would attain criticality by September and the second by early 2012.

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