

Kudankulam protest: 23,000 surrender voter ID cards

Chennai: Around 23,000 people belonging to nine villages in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu have surrendered their voter identity cards to draw attention to the continued neglect of the peaceful protest against the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project (KNPP), said a top activist.

"We have received around 23,000 voter identity cards from people living in nine villages - Idinthakarai, Thomaiyarpuram, Perumanal, Kuduthalai, Kudankulam, Vairavikinaru, Kuthankuli, Kuttapuli and Avidaiyalpuram," S.P. Udayakumar, coordinator of the People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy (PMANE), told IANS over phone from Idinthakarai.

Earlier, PMANE had decided to hand over the voter identity cards to the Radhapuram Tehsildar. "We spoke to the Radhapuram Tehsildar. He expressed his inability to receive the cards in person," Udayakumar said.

The decision to surrender the voter identity cards was taken by PMANE as the central and the state governments remain silent on the indefinite fast undertaken by round 340 people at Idinthakarai for nine days.

PMANE has agreed to withdraw its current struggle if the central government commits to a timeframe for fulfilling some of their demands, said Udayakumar.

He said PMANE Tuesday launched the 'Respect India' campaign, similar to the 'Quit India' call given during the struggle for Indian independence.

According to Udayakumar, India is facing a situation where its sovereignty, independence, freedom, natural resources, livelihood of the poor, their right to life, and the very future of the country are in imminent peril.

India's atomic power plant operator NPCIL is building two 1,000 MW reactors at Kudankulam in Tirunelveli district, around 650 km from here.

Work at the project had come to a standstill last year after villagers in the area, fearing for lives in case of a nuclear accident, mounted an intensive protest.

The Tamil Nadu government had earlier passed a resolution asking the central government to halt work at the plant and to allay the fears of locals.

To resolve the issue, the central and state governments set up two panels.

The central panel submitted its final report Jan 31. The Tamil Nadu government set up another expert committee which too favoured the project.

In March this year, the state government gave its green signal to the project and also announced Rs.500 crore for local area and infrastructure development. Following that, work at KNPP was restarted with police protection.