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Visit of bankrupt Westinghouse this week to India perpetuates unwanted and unneeded nuclear power project

TAKOMA PARK, MD, February 6, 2018 --The bankrupt American nuclear company, Westinghouse, which has been offloaded by its parent company Toshiba as a disastrous financial liability, will send its executives to India this week in an attempt to resuscitate its planned six-reactor project in the village of Kovvada in Andhra Pradesh on the country's eastern coast.

But, say two groups who are critics of the project, Westinghouse has no business preying upon communities in India by pushing its untested nuclear technology on an unwilling population. The Westinghouse nuclear project has been vehemently resisted by locals, who see it as a threat to their environment, health, livelihood and traditional lifestyle.

The financially destitute company wants to supply India with six 1,208 MW reactor units of its AP1000 design. But, the AP1000 design is untested and has run into regulatory issues, massive cost and time over-runs and serious safety questions in the US, UK, China and other countries.

"This project is an all-round disaster-in-the-making, as it threatens to destroy the fragile ecology of India's eastern coast, and endanger the safety of people in densely populated areas," said Kumar Sundaram of DiaNuke, an India-based international organization that looks at the interconnectedness between nuclear issues and other struggles for justice, equality, dignity, transparency and democracy.

"It will disenfranchise thousands of people in local communities by depriving them of traditional livelihoods and sustainable lifestyles which they have maintained for centuries," he said.

"Westinghouse clearly sees India as easy pickings," said Linda Pentz Gunter, international specialist at the US advocacy group, Beyond Nuclear. "India has never re-evaluated nuclear safety since the Fukushima disaster and has negligible environmental controls and oversight. Furthermore, Indian authorities have clamped down on

protesters who have been subjected to violence, trumped up charges and accusations, and have been excluded from public meetings by force. There is no semblance of an open, democratic process in the siting of new nuclear projects.”

The 2008 US-India nuclear deal helped open the way for nuclear companies like Westinghouse desperate to maintain a foothold in a precipitously falling global nuclear market. The deal, first introduced in 2005 by then US President George W. Bush and Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, lifted a three-decade US moratorium on nuclear trade with India. It provides US assistance to India’s civilian nuclear energy program, even though India is not a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, a condition for such deals between foreign powers.

But while the Indian government initially chose to hold foreign nuclear companies liable for any accident on Indian soil, it has since scrambled to find workarounds to keep the interest — and business — of Westinghouse, as well as the French government-owned nuclear company, EDF. The French contract is for a six-reactor project in Jaitapur which would provide 9,900MW in total, making it the world’s largest single-location nuclear power plant.

GE-Hitachi, which had originally planned to build in Kovvada, canceled its deal due to dissatisfaction over the liability issue, which could still hold foreign companies accountable for a disaster. Westinghouse was chased out of Gujarat due to overwhelming public opposition, before replacing GE in Kovvada.

“The US government has been pressuring India to do away with the provisions of its domestic nuclear liability law although it provides ridiculously limited protection to the potential victims in case of a nuclear accident,” said Sundaram.

“The Indian government has made every effort to comply with US demands and to undermine the act through back-door deals, including providing for an insurance pool created by public-sector companies where the nuclear suppliers can channel their liability,” Sundaram added.

Westinghouse has a lamentable track record in the US. One of its two projects — to build two AP1000 reactors in South Carolina — has already been abandoned, leaving ratepayers with a \$2 billion debt burden. The two plants were so massively over budget and behind schedule they were predicted to have cost at least \$11.4 billion if completed.

A second Westinghouse US project for two AP1000 reactors in Georgia is more than five years behind schedule. Costs there have at least doubled and are predicted to rise to more than \$27 billion. It was re-evaluated late last year and given the continued green light, but it is ratepayers again who will bear the burden of the project’s vast expense.

“If Westinghouse is permitted to go forward with the Kovvada project, India can anticipate interminable delays, massive cost overruns and environmental contamination

at best; a nuclear disaster at worst, if indeed the project ever gets completed, which is doubtful.” Pentz Gunter said.

“What is more likely is that Kovvada’s economy and ecology will have been ruined and time will have been wasted that would have been better used installing cheaper, cleaner and safer renewable energy instead,” she concluded.

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Beyond Nuclear aims to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future. Beyond Nuclear advocates for an energy future that is sustainable, benign and democratic. The Beyond Nuclear team works with diverse partners and allies to provide the public, government officials, and the media with the critical information necessary to move humanity toward a world beyond nuclear. Beyond Nuclear: [6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 400, Takoma Park, MD 20912](mailto:Info@beyondnuclear.org). Info@beyondnuclear.org. www.beyondnuclear.org.