



## **Kaiga Nuclear power plant expansion sparks stir**

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Hundreds of people have thronged Mallapura, a tiny town on the river Kali valley in Uttara Kannada district in Karnataka to protest against the expansion of Kaiga Nuclear power plant in the sensitive western ghats on Sunday. Mallapura is an adjacent town near the nuclear plant.

The protest was led by powerful religious pontiffs in the area which include Vishwasha Theertha Swamiji of the pejawar mutt in Udupi. Addressing the huge gathering he called on the people to resist the expansion plans of the Kaiga Nuclear plant. He said “Scientists have explained what will happen here and we must resist the expansion of this power station.”

Environmental activists, religious leaders, community leaders, political activists have demanded government to stop its expansion of Kaiga nuclear plant on the banks of river Kali which flows in the eco sensitive region of the Western Ghats.

The Kaiga plant had started commercial operations in November 2000, after being commissioned in 1989. The plant set up 56 km away from Karwar, currently has four functional units generating 220 MW of power. 33% of the power generated is reserved for Karnataka. This protest was organised after the authorities got all environmental regulatory hurdles were cleared at the state and Centre level on August 29. Kaiga Nuclear plant currently has four units but the Nuclear Power Corporation Ltd. under the Department of Atomic Energy has proposed a fifth and sixth unit.

The protesters argue that expanding the Kaiga plant will take up 54 hectares of forests in the eco-sensitive Western Ghats in the buffer zone of Kali Tiger Reserve. They urged the Government to consider replacing it with other safer and cheaper power generating options like solar and wind energy. They also fear with lack of safety protocol the project will put the lives of the people surrounding villages in danger.

According to Shankar Sharma a power policy expert this would lead to over dependency on water and has always the danger of contamination. According to him these units once commissioned will consume 7500 cubic metres of water per hour which is sufficient for the livelihood of 15 lakh people.

The protesters refer a Tata Memorial Centre report in 2010 had said there was a spurt in cases of cancer over the past two decades in Kaiga. Experts insist that this is because of the radioactive pollution caused by the nuclear power plant.

The Government has neither acknowledged such reports, nor has it carried out any assessment on its own.

Professor TV Ramachandra, an expert in water management from IISC, a premier Scientific research Institute in Bengaluru, who took part in the protest said "Today, science, spirituality and the culture of this region has come together because we have not received a response from the Indian government."

In December 2018, local environmental groups — Uttara Kannada Zilla Psrisara Samrakshana Samiti, Bedti Aghanashini Kolla Samiti and Vruksha Laksha and residents of the area — had also opposed the expansion of the power plant during the mandated public consultation process. Recently, even Gangadharendra Saraswati Swamiji, the seer of Sonda Swarnavalli Mutt, had also opposed the nuclear plant's expansion.

The Kaiga nuclear power plant located in Kaiga, Karnataka, is being expanded by two additional units of 700MW each to increase its capacity to 2.28GW. Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL), administered by Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), will develop and operate the new units. Construction on the expansion is expected to be started in 2020 and anticipated to be completed in 2026. The establishment of two new units 5 and 6, and expansion of the existing township, is estimated to cost Rs210bn (£2.35bn).

NPCIL secured wildlife clearance for the Kaiga nuclear power plant expansion from the State Board for Wildlife (Karnataka) in January 2019. The project also secured wildlife clearance in August 2019, from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). An expert wildlife panel led by the environment minister also approved the project.

Environmentalists, however, raised concerns over the project as it is also located close to the Kali Tiger Reserve and would also result in cutting of approximately 8,700 trees.

The Kaiga nuclear power plant is located at Kaiga and Mallapur-Virje villages in Uttara Kannada district, approximately 3.5km from Karwar-Ilikal SH-6. It lies 16km upstream of the Kadra dam on the left bank of the Kali River. The proposed new units 5 and 6 will be located adjacent to the existing operating units 3 and 4, in the same site. Eom/blr