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## West

# At 42, Tarapur remains an icon of N-power stability

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**TARAPUR (Maharashtra):** About 100 km north of Mumbai, off the National Highway towards Ahmedabad, the lush green and quiet landscape suddenly buzzes with activity. The atmosphere at the small railway station at Boisar on Mumbai's Western Railway suburban train service is quite alike any other suburban station around Mumbai, except for the fact that nearly all industrial, commercial and educational activity here is inextricably linked to the Tarapur Atomic Power Station (TAPS), India's iconic first atomic power plant.



In October this year (2011), the units 1 and 2 at TAPS completed 42 years of uninterrupted operation, which is a remarkable by any standards. The period of 42 years is considered extraordinary and special in case of the life of any nuclear power plant, and considering that the technology then available to India was not exactly state-of-the-art, the achievement at Tarapur is double remarkable. It shows the stability and dependability that is inbuilt into nuclear power plants in India.



The Tarapur Maharashtra Site includes Tarapur Atomic Power Station 1 to 4. While stations 1 and 2 were brought in commercial operation in October 1969, units 3 and 4 became operational in August 2006 and September 2005, respectively. Collectively, the Tarapur complex generates about 1400

MW of electricity, informs Mr R.P.S. Tomar, Station Director, TAPS 3-4.

The fact that TAPS has transformed the lives of people in the area is also evident from the fact that the parking lot at the outer gate is packed with motor-cycles. Notably, there are no cycles, and all the workers board a bus from this point to go inside the plant premises.

A little beyond the shed is the first entry gate with the strictest security check one can imagine at a public facility.

It is re-assuring to know that the security check is followed with every employee, officer and manager, every day, every time he or she leaves or enters the premises. The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) has a 500-strong contingent deployed at all times in the plant and outside.

“The power plant is the lifeline of this town and in fact the busiest place in the Palghar taluka of Thane district,” says Arvind Namdeo, a shop-owner a little away from the Boisar station. The habitation on the road towards the power plant starts thinning as the boundaries of the outer and then the inner exclusion zone begin, but the vegetation remains unchanged – lush and green with the recent monsoon showers.

This is in stark contrast to the change that shows in the environs a few kilometres before a thermal power plant – such as a sudden increase in air temperature, huge mountains of coal and ash, smoke and fire bellowing out of high chimneys. But there is nothing of this kind when approaching TAPS.

It is not only the air that is clean, but even the flora and fauna around the plant look healthy, setting at rest any doubt that one may be having about the surroundings of an atomic power station being hazardous to nature or animal and human health. According to Atomic Energy Regulatory Board guidelines, an exclusion zone of 1.5 km radius has to be established around the atomic power plant and no public habitation is permitted in the area. This is known as the inner exclusion zone. But the greenery and birds are quite noticeable.

The public awareness and welfare activity cell (PAWAC) of TAPS is perhaps the most visible unit of the power plant as far as the local people are concerned. Members of this unit are constantly on the move, visiting neighbouring villages, talking to villagers and other inhabitants, creating awareness, redressing complaints and planning to expand the welfare activities. DD Akre, the PAWAC chairman, a familiar figure around the TAPS area, says that welfare works for the benefit of the local people in the neighbouring villages are especially concentrated in education, health and hygiene, medical care, drinking water, environment protection, local sports and cultural promotion and other community needs including crematorium.

“It is a constant exercise, not confined to certain days in the week or month. Our team keeps moving around these villages to find out if there is anything we need to need to do to make these people feel that the power plant is here to improve their lives.” The school building at Davarpada, Dandi, Akarpatti and Pophran are examples in point. Within the sprawling TAPS Colony there is a Marathi School, a Gujarati school besides a school for mentally challenged children.

But do the villagers have any specific problems related to the power plant? “Not really, but our attempt is to create awareness by organizing talks and welfare activities to impart information on peaceful use of nuclear technology, nuclear power programme and enhance

the confidence of the villagers about advantages of nuclear power,” says Mr Anil Seth, Training Superintendent, Nuclear Training Centre at TAPS.

Medical camps organized by the plant administration routinely draw big crowds of villagers and the medical experts cover a range of ailments from eye care, cancer detection, gynaecology to deworming of children. The mobile medical van, too, is a familiar sight in villages and NPCIL medical officers extend their services to include distribution of free medicines as well. They also support organizations like Medical Association, Lions Club and Dhavle Hospital, Palghar. As many 24 villages take advantage of this facility.

The rehabilitation package given to the plant affected persons (PAPs) in and around Tarapur in Thane district of Maharashtra have more than compensated the people for their loss. The people have actually generated life time assets that they have kept aside, often unattended, as they go about life as usual.

This is quite a pleasant surprise especially in present times when compensation for land acquired for industrial or other purposes has snowballed into a national crisis of sorts. Not only the affected people in Tarapur have been given houses in a planned township, they are also being provided services for a life time such as school, post office, hospital, community centre, shops and electricity.

The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) that runs the atomic power stations in the country, has developed two housing enclaves in Popharan and Akarpatti villages (both located in the tribal area) in Palghar taluka of Thane district. Under the rehabilitation package, single-storey ground floor dwellings of 370 sq ft each were constructed on a well laid-out plot of land that had been acquired by NPCIL. Along with the houses, a school, a zila parishad building, community centre, hospital, post office and a market place were also constructed. Nearly 60 to 70 per cent of the claimants were fishermen, and they do not live here. With the year 2005 determined as the cut off for establishing the legitimate PAPs, a total 1250 such dwellings were made. The stipulation was to provide one dwelling for every adult member of the family.

But now, as years have passed, not only the number of members in a family is growing, but some minor have attained majority as well, so there is a demand that more such houses be given to them also. “But at this rate the demand may never end,” feels Mr D.D. Akre. The PAP committee office bearers, however, have a different view. “All we want is permanent jobs in the NPCIL,” says Priyanka More, a vocal member of the committee at Popharan.

To this, the NPCIL response is that in the power plant, the only jobs that could be given to such people were the unskilled ones such as in cleaning, canteen and housekeeping. And as a matter of policy, all such works have been outsourced. Interestingly, while the villagers say the NPCIL must force the contractor to employ the villagers, the plant management says it cannot do so as a matter of policy.

PAP members agree that the rehabilitation and compensation package offered and given by NPCIL is much more than what the Maharashtra state government gives for its projects anywhere in the state. “The benchmark set by us is high and it might be difficult for any other organization to reach it,” says another official of the PAWAC. Besides, the running and

maintenance of many facilities has to be done by the state administration which sometimes is lacking.

Incidentally the number of actual residents in Akarpatti village is much higher as fewer of them are fishermen. They are now working or running their business in the neighbouring villages, therefore the place has a prosperous look with the number of well-built, decorated and expanded houses here being much higher. The two townships, incidentally, are not located in the back of beyond, but very much on the side of the road.

As India gears up to strengthen and expand its nuclear power generation programme, Tarapur stands as a beacon and reminder that what began as an experiment, has now established itself as a icon the world over for its remarkable feat.