

# Further delay feared in Kudankulam project

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Chennai, June 1 Nuclear Power Corporation of India's Web site gives August 2009 as the "expected date of (commencement) of commercial operation of the first unit of the Kudankulam nuclear power project". But even those in NPCIL do not believe that.

NPCIL is putting up two 1,000 MW units of light water reactor-based nuclear power plants at Kudankulam, near Tirunelveli, southern Tamil Nadu, with help from Russia. The technology, equipment and fuel (Uranium) are all sourced from Russia.

The first of the units was to go on stream in December 2007 (and the second in December 2008).

However, there have been huge delays, mainly on account of equipment supplies from Russia.

The date of commissioning of the first unit was later revised to August 2009. This, according to sources both within and outside NPCIL, is not likely to be met.

## **Milestone event**

Sources at the project site indicate that a key milestone is likely to be crossed in about a fortnight. It is called 'bearing gear operation', the completion of which will make the turbine operation-ready.

Sources have told Business Line that a number of items of steam piping are yet to come from Russia. It is learnt that the Russians have given an assurance that all the piping supplies will be completely delivered in two months. Thereafter, it will take three months for the welding work. Inspection and clearance will take at least another month.

Therefore, the most optimistic estimate of the date of the first unit going on stream is January 2010. Even this assumes that the erection of the reactor — a job handled by Russians themselves — will also be completed by then.

## **CEA report**

Tellingly enough, it appears that even the Central Electricity Authority does not expect Kudankulam power to come up in 2009-10.

The CEA's 'load generation balance report', released in April, lists all the projects that the Authority expects to be commissioned in 2009-10, across all sectors — thermal, hydro and nuclear. But there is no mention of Kudankulam. The report expects only 660 MW of nuclear power on the grid, comprising two units of Rajasthan and one of Kaiga.

The delay in the commissioning of the Kudankulam project has been one of the chief reasons for the severe power shortage (of 1,000 MW) in Tamil Nadu. But, sources note, next year should be much better after Kudankulam-I spins into operation.

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