

Coal-based power plants pose a major ecological threat

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HYDERABAD: After Sompeta, where four persons were killed in protests against the thermal power plant, increasing concern is being expressed over manner in which permissions were granted to highly polluting coal-based power projects that threaten to turn the Andhra coastline into a huge ash pond.

Already, 30 thermal power plants have been reportedly sanctioned with an ambitious target of generating 50,000 mega watts while 40 more are believed to be in the pipeline, all based on mostly imported coal. It is estimated that 7.50 lakh tonnes of coal is required to be burnt everyday for producing this quantum of power, which means generation of

about two tonnes of ash or a whopping 730 lakh tonnes every year. A few years down the line after production commences, these 30 power stations could leave behind massive mounds of untreated ash or worse still, discharge the same into the sea, given poor regulatory mechanism.

Environmental, civil society and other concerned groups warn that locating a string of so many coal-based power projects plumb on the coastline could prove to be an ecological disaster, besides posing a grave threat to the livelihood of fishermen and farmers. This is because coal, having low calorific value and high ash content, is considered a heavily polluting fuel generating black carbon, sulphates and other gaseous pol-

lutants primarily due to incomplete and inefficient combustion. Coal-fired thermal power plants are responsible for almost 21 per cent of the greenhouse gas emissions and hence are being phased out in developed countries.

"It is quite surprising how the State government has permitted these projects with coal as fuel, in one go. Apparently, there is a contradiction in such policies. While the Indian government signs international climate change mitigation agreement to bring down greenhouse gas emissions, States allow coal-guzzling power plants spewing these very emissions," said Somireddy Chandramohan Reddy, senior TDP leader expressing concern over arbitrary permissions.