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Nuclear Win Chaddhas

By Kannan Srinivasan

The DAE's so-called 'denial' of the story — *Ratanahalli — India's Kahuta* (Sunday Free Press Journal 26 July, '87) serves only to confirm it.

No official denial has been made. Neither the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, nor any responsible official not even a spokesman of the Department has been quoted. It is only "a senior scientist of the Department of Atomic Energy" who prefers no to be named!

And what is the denial itself? "It should not be construed that the country had a factory where weapons grade nuclear materials were being enriched." Precisely: the article has said that such a factory is *being built* where enrichment will soon begin.

Let the DAE clarify: Does the Rare Materials Plant at Ratanahalli, exist? If so, for what purpose is it being built?

In fact, work at this top-secret project 20 kms. from Mysore, Karnataka, continues at feverish speed. Phase one of the Rare Materials Plant, IRE (RMP) is underway.

The RMP centrifuge testing facility is *already* operational. The centrifuges, each about six feet high, are now being installed. By the end of 1988, these are actually expected to produce "through-put" — some enriched uranium. By 1990, RMP is expected to produce quantities of enriched uranium for nuclear weapons.

Rupees 350 crores have already been spent on this project, being administered by Dr R K Garg, Chairman Indian Rare Earths Limited. Orders have been placed on international suppliers and their agents here who know

that uranium enrichment equipment is embargoed. Realizing that India will pay any price to keep this project secret, they have frequently been able to swindle our Government.

Costs are routinely inflated by these nuclear Win Chaddhas and substandard equipment is supplied. A good instance is the case of VAW (Voest Alpine Werken), an Austrian firm which IRE (RMP) contracted with to supply seamless pipes (without any joint) of Monel (an alloy of nickel and copper). Instead, jointed pipes were supplied, which are completely useless. The project authorities have had to accept the costs, and order all over again.

The centrifuges are made of an unusually strong alloy, maraging steel. Mishra Dhatu Nigam, the public sector defence undertaking at Hyderabad produces this by alloying nickel, tungsten and molybdenum with very high purity steel. Amazingly, even this high purity steel is imported in large quantities.

India has not faced Pakistan's difficulty with international suppliers. Virtually all the orders were placed at the very outset of the project, instead of as and when required. As a result, most of the equipment which would arouse suspicion, and might provoke embargo, is already in India.

Sensitive items have not been ordered directly by the DAE, but instead through outside corporations. Most important of all is the fact that India has a significantly greater technological capability than Pakistan. So instead of ordering entire units, we have been able to order highly specific components — valves, bolts, pumps, compressors.

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