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Gaya declaration on clean, green energy sent to Nitish Kumar

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PATNA: Experts gathered at 'Bijli Vikalp Sangam' on Sunday provided a framework that acknowledged that future electricity scenarios have to take into account limited natural resources, accelerated environmental degradation, growing populations, high energy poverty and climate change. It recommended an urgent paradigm shift based on principles of sustainability, equity and justice.

The Bodh Gaya declaration has been sent to the chief minister Nitish Kumar, who can play a role in showing a truly alternate model for the country. The participants also resolved to take this message to nationwide audiences and to constructively engage with decision making processes.

Participants from across the country were at Bodhgaya from March 4-6 to discuss ecologically sustainable and socio-economically equitable transitions for the energy sector in the country. Bihar was chosen as the venue for the 'Vikalp Sangam', since while it is showing a keen interest and potential to embark on a different path to provide electricity to its people, it is also dangerously exploring nuclear and coal projects that would have adverse impacts and be a costly option.

The gathering included more than 70 people including representatives from National Alliance for Peoples Movement (NAPM), Prayas (Energy Group), Kalpavriksh, Greenpeace India and Oxfam India. These energy experts, practitioners and civil society groups engaged with the challenges of the current model of development and explored alternatives.

An organiser and founder member of Kalpavriksh, Ashish Kothari said: "Coal, nuclear and large hydro based centralized systems have failed in providing sustainable and equitable energy solutions. In this context, alternatives like decentralised renewable energy, have huge potential to provide real and reliable energy choices. This was also evident from our visit to Dharnai (Jehanabad), an example of a solar based micro grid project run by civil society and the community. "

"About a quarter of India's population has no access to any source of electricity despite a massive increase, of more than 200 times, in power generation capacity since Independence. Many of those with access suffer from erratic supply. The fact that Delhi's per capita electricity consumption is more than 10 times that of Bihar, is representative of the inequity in consumption in the country", Kothari said.

"There is an increasing evidence that nuclear power is neither clean, affordable, nor safe; coal power is not only dirty, but also adds greatly to our carbon footprint; and large hydro is massively destructive", experts gathered at Bodh Gaya said.

"We call for an urgent paradigm shift, from the currently dominant model of consumption-led development, to creating frameworks of human and ecological wellbeing. This transition should be defined by the principles of sustainability, equity, and justice. This requires special attention to the needs of the most marginalized, including women, Dalits, small & marginalised farmers and particularly vulnerable tribal groups", experts feel.

Experts call for action on policies and practices to prioritize renewable energy to meet all future electricity needs, build consensus for a new energy paradigm driven by social and individual responsibility, prior consent of all concerned communities before initiating any power project and others.