

Signature campaign against Chemplast

By PREETI KANNAN

Chennai, June 29: About 500 residents from four villages in and around the State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu, Cuddalore, recently launched a massive signature campaign to protest against Chemplast Sanmar Limited's second proposal to set up a polyvinyl chloride plastic factory in the district. The signatures have been sent by residents from Sangolikuppam, Sonanchavadi, Semmankuppam and Pachaiyamkuppam to the ministry of environment and forests and are awaiting the ministry's response.

The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board has forwarded the proposal for the factory to the Reconstituted Expert Committee (industry), set up by the environment ministry, for reconsideration. The committee will discuss the proposal and reconsider Chemplast's second proposal in a two-day meeting, which began on Thursday in New Delhi. In 2002, Chemplast Sanmar had put forth a similar proposal for their PVC project to the state government for permission to set up a factory in Cuddalore. The Tamil Nadu government had rejected the project on environmental grounds. Activists say that when the com-

pany gave a proposal to locate the factory in Krishnapatnam in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, the community there also rejected it. Speaking to this newspaper, Mr S.B. Prabhakar Rao, the president of corporate affairs in Chemplast, said, "We are pushing for the project to be approved. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board has examined the proposal and has issued a No Objection Certificate. Now, the ministry will have to approve it."

Mr S. Pugazendhi, a resident of Sangolikuppam, one of the four villages that has launched the campaign said, "SIPCOT Cuddalore has enough chemical

industries polluting the environment. The air is so polluted that we are unable to breathe freely. Recently another chemical industry, that makes rocket fuel, was given permission to be set up. We will soon have to attach oxygen cylinders to our bodies and walk around to even be alive." The anguished resident added, "The industries have affected all our livelihoods. The water is so saline and it has affected fishermen and farmers too. Chemplast will need 1,20,000 litres of water every hour if they set up their factory here. How will we manage to bring up our children here? If the government does not care

about our plight, who else will?" Shweta Narayan from SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitors, a community group from fighting for the rights of Cuddalore residents, said, "The pollution control board has done little about the existing pollution in the district. The state government has raised concerns over the environmental impact the Sethusamudram Project will have, but on the other hand it is prepared to overlook the environmental impact assessment procedures the factory will have. Chemplast has made a few cosmetic changes and has proposed this project again."