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## Comics Hired by Nuclear Power Corp.

By Biman Mukherji



Aditi Malhotra/The Wall Street Journal

The comic book titled 'Story of Budhia.'

A comic book character, created to allay concerns about nuclear power in India in the wake of the disaster at Japan's Fukushima Daichi power plant, is helping the Indian government overcome opposition to atomic energy and address a crippling electricity shortage.

In a [38-page comic book](#), Sameer "an educated local youth" who lives in the city, sets out to dispel what the comic describes as "the many myths surrounding nuclear science," existing among villagers in India, "and explains to them its various benefits to the mankind."

The comic characters ask questions such as "Will my cattle die? Will my land become barren? Will I be able to have children if I live near [a power plant](#)?"

Questions about the risks and rewards of nuclear power have been raised for years in India where the country's first nuclear power plant started [operating last month](#) after

more than a decade in [the works](#). It is a debate likely to continue to rear its head as [the state-run Nuclear Power Corp.](#) cranks up an ambitious plan to raise nuclear power production to 63 [Giga Watts](#) by 2032 from 4.7 Giga Watts currently.

India, lacking any large reserves of crude oil or natural gas, is looking to nuclear energy to help bridge a power-supply gap estimated at up to 9% of total demand.

Kudankulam, the Russian-backed plant in [Tamil Nadu](#) southern India which began producing power in October, was subject to widespread protests by locals, particularly after Japan's Fukushima plant was damaged by an earthquake there in March 2011.

Construction on the Indian plant began in 2002 and it was supposed to be operational by 2006 but protests by locals and anti-nuclear lobbyists delayed the start up and the plant was also hit by lawsuits, which claimed it posed a risk to thousands of people living nearby.

The work to commission the 1,000-megawatt first unit of [the Kudankulam plant](#) picked up speed after [the Supreme Court](#) in May dismissed petitions challenging the project.

Armed with the apex court's backing, the NPC has stepped up the communication campaign by launching films on local cable television channels based on the same characters as in the comic. The company has also set up exhibitions and vans with audio visual equipment to show the film in remote villages.

In "The Story of Budhia" Sameer, the college-going grandson of the village chief tells anxious villagers that "the electricity produced by a nuclear power plant is clean, green and economical."

"And it actually prevents environmental pollution," Sameer tells the villagers.

"Therefore all your crops, orchards and fishes remain unaffected, non-polluted and safe," he adds in the story.

Thousands of copies of the comic book are being distributed at proposed and existing nuclear plant sites including Hissar in Haryana, [Mahabaswadi](#) in Rajasthan and Kuwad in Andhra Pradesh.

"Our aim was that a rickshaw puller, a farmer or a housewife should be able to understand about nuclear energy," says [Amitesh Srivastava](#), corporate communications manager at NPC.

"This has reduced opposition to a large extent and people have started to understand that it will be good for us and can go a long way in reducing our electricity shortage problem," Mr. Srivastava said.

He acknowledges that some opposition to nuclear power generation still remains, but says the comic book characters have helped to win over families, especially those with children.

However, a Greenpeace worker said the comic book campaign was misplaced.

"It is very, very condescending because you assume that people on the other side can't understand. If you really want to engage people, then you talk to them about nuclear issues," said Karuna Raina, senior energy campaigner for Greenpeace India.

"Don't assume they can't understand. If they are protesting, they are understanding," she said, adding that there was still considerable opposition to nuclear power projects in the country.

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