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15 MAR 2011

My dear Prime Minister

THE JAPANESE TRAGEDY- NUCLEAR DISASTER- LESSONS FOR INDIA

It has been some time since I wrote to you. The last time was to share my concerns about Jammu and Kashmir. I am happy to see some forward movement on that score.

Meanwhile the ongoing devastating developments in Japan have served as a wake up call, which we will ignore at our peril. However I would like to highlight the following:

- Even the most meticulously designed and planned technologies can fail or malfunction with total unpredictability when confronted by the forces of Nature and a wide range of extreme climate and other unforeseen events.
 - That we have allowed ourselves to be led astray by the arguments, primarily circulated from the nuclear industry and their lobbies, **THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE, [aka TINA]** to nuclear power as an engine of growth.
 - It is even more tragic that we have convinced ourselves that Nuclear power is cheap while solar power is prohibitive in costs. There is more than enough evidence of available technologies available to demonstrate that solar energy can be provided at a cost of Rs 5 crore per mega Watt , while some estimate that the cost per MW for power from the AREVA built Jaitapur facility could cost upto be Rs 22 cores per MW.
 - Perhaps we need to listen to and heed voices other than those who defend blindly the dangerous road map we have adopted!
 - The additional cost [only in money not in the long reaching environmental costs] of nuclear fuel, disposal of nuclear waste and the dismantling the nuclear power plant has not been included in calculations. The normal cost for dismantling a nuclear power plant according to experts is about one and a half times the cost of the project after the normal life of a reactor of 40 years! No doubt these costs will probably double in the next decade or so.
 - The whole of Rural India can be provided de-centralized small solar power stations as demonstrated by Bangladesh where there are already over 5 lac such units in the Sunderbans. These can be controlled by local communities – but yes the draw back is there will not be any large scale profits to be made by a few.

- The Planning Commission in its report of March 2010, has opined that India has a potential for exploiting 500,000 Mega Watts of Solar power. Our present argument that investment in nuclear energy is a pre-requisite for maintaining a growth rate of 9% urgently needs critical re-examination.

- **SO WHAT IS THE WAY AHEAD – SOME RECOMMENDATIONS**

Declare an immediate moratorium on all planned new nuclear reactors. *There is everything to be gained by using the 'precautionary principle' and NOT allowing ourselves to be swayed by the vested interests who are not willing to seriously examine the fault lines about Nuclear Energy, Radiation and all the other hidden costs about which there is enough literature and evidence.*

- **Shut down, at least temporarily, all existing reactors until we have assured ourselves as to the safety systems and all other safeguards. (Since the present contribution of Nuclear energy to the grid is really negligible, this will not make any serious impact.)**
- **After checking out the safety standards of the operational reactors, announce a decision to review possibility of phasing them out on super annuation.**
- **Amend or annul MOU's if required. (Germany has decided to review its nuclear power program and has temporarily shut down all its nuclear power plants for a period of three months.) It has also reversed its earlier decision to add, some more nuclear Power plants, and to shut down and phase out those which are functioning)**
- **•Appoint a task force [IITs or other institutions?] to develop multiple models of solar power – in a time bound framework – this must come directly under the PMO and be funded independently with no holds barred.**
- **Re-examine and rationalise the present grossly weighted and imbalanced system of subsidies and incentives which privileges nuclear over solar.**
- **Set up a multi disciplinary task force (including members of civil society) to do a realistic recast of India's energy future and energy requirements.**
- **Implement immediately energy saving measures at all levels – our strategy must be a combination of energy efficiency, stopping wastage, and creating new renewable energy sources. •**
- **The atomic energy regulatory agency and all civilian reactor deals must be transparent and not come under the official secrets act as at present. These need urgent change and must come under the ambit of the existing R.T.I. rules.**

Conclusion

India is at a crossroads about decisions for charting our future. The Japanese tragedy should seriously be utilized as a wake up call to have a fresh look and a re-think about some of our earlier decisions. Clearly we as a nation must make use of what comes to us in plenty and for free- namely solar energy - it is not surprising that we in this country have since time immemorial worshipped Surya Bhagvan - and the immense power that flows therefrom - and with none of the destructive potential of the atom.

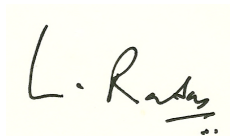
I end by quoting from a scientist friend who sent me a message this morning :

“Mother Nature has given us a deadly warning that it is past time to end our reliance on nuclear power and invest instead in solar power, the only safe nuclear reactor that exists - 93 million miles from Earth. The question is: Will the disaster in Japan open our eyes to the need for change, or will we be content to continue to tempt fate and simply hope that we do not become the next place on the planet where nuclear power fails catastrophically?”

You have a wonderful historical opportunity to take leadership globally in moving us in a different direction and make the world, and our precious and ancient land a safer place for our children and grandchildren..

Warm regards

Sincerely yours

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light yellow background. The signature reads "L. Ramdas" with a small flourish underneath the name.

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