Why are we marching from Tarapur to Jaitapur?

PRESS RELEASE - for favour of publication – 21st April 2011

Issued in Public Interest by Shri K. Ashok Rao President, National Confederation of Officers Associations of Central Public Sector Undertakings and Adviser, All India Power Engineers Federation. - J 152 Saket New Delhi 110017 Tele 9868101640 kashokrao@gmail.cim

Why are we marching from Tarapur to Jaitapur? Are we against development? Do we not envisage an India - where our children would study under bright electric lights - where we would be able to bridge the distance between cities with fast electrical trains, - where the sick can be comfortable in an air conditioned room? These are irrelevant questions (insinuations) for us, whose livelihood depends on everything from manufacture of equipment to generation and utilisation of electrical power.

Like in the railway coal engine, in a thermal power station, coal is burnt to produce steam which rotates the turbine. Now, imagine a big water soap bubble, if you prick it, it will splinter into several pieces. The famous scientist Albert Einstein, discovered that if you prick (with a high speed electron) a Uranium particle it will splinter and some of the matter will get converted into energy, this energy will release high speed electrons which will further split the particles and release more energy, and like that more and more energy is released. If this energy release is not controlled the result is an Atom Bomb. Later, mankind started controlling the atom bomb inside a containment chamber. By controlling it mankind learnt how to produce steam to turn the turbine and produce electricity.

It should be obvious that there is inherently a great danger when controlling an atom bomb inside a chamber. Even a small mistake in controlling, and the result could be disastrous. Even in very developed and technologically advanced countries like USA (Three Mile Island), the Soviet Union (Chernobyl) and Japan (Fukushima) there have been disastrous failures and the consequences were very serious. Unlike anything else, nuclear energy generates dangerous radiation (rays that travel in the air) coming from chemicals like iodine and caesium that can cause cancer or death. Once these radiations are released it is impossible to recall them.

Another problem is that after coal is burnt, the ash can be used, but the uranium fuel even after it is used fully it remains dangerous and emits radiation. Therefore the spent fuel has to be stored safely for thousands of years. And any mistake in this storage can also be as dangerous as a mistake in the reactor.

In Japan today, everybody living within 20 Kms of Fukushima (1256 Sq Kms) has been asked to compulsorily leave their homes and go to relief camps. Those within 30 kms(2827 Sq kms) have been asked to voluntarily leave (but fear makes it compulsory, since nobody wants to take a risk) United States has asked its citizens to stay atleast 80 kms away (20,107 Sq.kms). In a major accident like Fukushima if this U.S. rule is applied in India, it would means that, if there is a disaster in Tarapur, Mumbai will have to be evacuated; if in Rawatbhata then Kota and if in Kalpakam then Chennai. Such is the extreme risk.

There are some who think that we should not take any risk at all, while others think we need to be careful but not run away from risk. They argue that after all even crossing a road has risks, but we do cross roads.

Whatever be your view on risk, you would agree that the Government must tell people the following

1. What are the risks? And what is being done to assure the people that the nuclear plants are safe. In India, everything related to Atomic Energy, including power generation, is a secret covered by the Official Secrets Act and AERB reports to the AEC.- That is the regulator is regulated.

2. Why does the Government not share with the people the details of accidents that took place in Narora, Kaiga and other nuclear power plants that are currently under operation?

3. Why is there this sudden rush for nuclear energy, even to the extent of risking the survival of the Government for an Indo – United States Civil Nuclear agreement? That too at a time when Germany has announced that it will by 2030 bring nuclear power to zero; Environment Minister Ms. Dominique Voynet says France is slowly shifting away from nuclear power and will replace aging reactors (as they become obsolete) with non-nuclear energy; Switzerland has suspended the approval process for three nuclear power plants; Austria has called for a review of Energy nuclear at the European level; the United States has not brought online any new nuclear power plant since 1979.

4. Is the rush because the developed countries want the exclusive use the World's oil resources and dump nuclear power on India as Dr. Condoleezza Rice the then US Secretary of State asserted in the US Senate "***Diversifying India's energy sector will help to alleviate the competition between India, the United States, and other rapidly expanding economies for scarce carbon-based energy resources"****?* No sane Indian power engineer, from Dr.Homi Bhabha onwards, has envisaged that within 41 years India would go from the present 3.8 Gigawatts India to 655 Gigawatts of nuclear power. That too, based largely on high cost imported reactors and not on the nationally accepted three stage nuclear development programme to develop self-reliance based on Indian PHWRs and thorium (of which India has a third of the world's reserves) Whose interests are being served?

5. Would not a string of nuclear power plants (mostly imported) that the is government planning along the coast jeopardising the livelihood of 26% of India's population (about 27 Crore people) who are fishermen?

6. How can the Government assure that the nuclear reactor proposed to be installed in Jaitapur is safe when it is not operating anywhere in the world? How and where are the engineers and employees going to be trained? How was the contract been finalised without an approved design and a firm price?

7. What is the cost (including hidden cost) of nuclear power and how does the cost compare with other forms of energy? How can there be affordable energy for the people with plants that cost Rs. 22 Crores per MW?

8. Why is this money not being used to develop technologies like coal gasification, fluidised bed boilers etc. that will provide abundant indigenous source of power? And technologies like solar energy and other renewable energy.

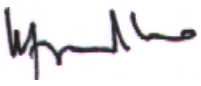
And finally

9. When the Government could not give justice to the victims of Bhopal Gas tragedy and punish the foreign suppliers why should we expect justice form the same Government?

10. Why should we trust Sarva Shri Manmohan Singh, SharatPawar, P Chidambaram, Montek Singh Aluwalia etc. (the 13 day Shri Vajpayee Government) who justified the ENRON's Dhabol project? And when the project ended in a loss of more than Rs. 25,000 Crores took no responsibility for their decisions?

Instead of giving answers, the Government of Maharashtra is imposing travel restrictions, arrests, repressions and police firing; the Prime Minister is doing all he can to assure the Americans and the Europeans that India will not go back on the import deals struck in secrecy; the *sarkari* scientists are twisting science to justify their salaries (including post retirement jobs with MNCs).

We are marching, to preserving the sovereignty of India We are marching, because we are convinced that the current nuclear policy and programme is not in national interest. And finally, we are marching, because what is at stake for the politicians and business is money and for us what is at stake is our life and that of our children and grandchildren.



(K. Ashok Rao)