

# ML Update: 15-21 March 2011

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## Quake and Tsunami in Japan :Questions for India

The intense earthquake followed by devastating tsunami in Japan has taken a massive toll of human life. This natural calamity of enormous proportions is estimated to have taken the lives of some 10,000 people in that country, while the number of those who are in relief camps, having lost their homes and loved ones, is about 30000. Japan is facing a huge humanitarian crisis with shortage of food and water.

It is doubly tragic that the devastation has been compounded by nuclear explosions in two of Japan's nuclear power plants, with the threat of another meltdown hovering over a third. Japan is the bearer of the grim legacy of the nuclear holocausts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Once again this time, the people of Japan will undergo the trauma and tragedy of nuclear disaster. At this hour of grave crisis, the worst since the WWII devastation, the people of India stand wholeheartedly by the people of Japan and share their grief and tragedy.

For us in India and in fact for the whole world, the tragedy of Japan should also serve as an urgent wake-up call about the unpredictability and inherent dangers of nuclear technology. It must be remembered that Japan, after all, has what was said to be the best quake-resistant nuclear technology in the world. Their preparedness and response for natural disasters too is second to none in the world. Yet, in the wake of the quake and tsunami this time, they were unable to avert explosions in their nuclear power facilities and the resultant radiation leaks which are likely to have grievous long-term consequences.

If this is the case in Japan with its superior technological expertise and preparedness, it is alarming to imagine the consequences of a similar situation in a country like India, which is not known for its prompt or effective response to disasters or for effective regulatory and safety mechanisms in any sector. Questions are rightly being raised about the safety of existing nuclear installations in India, as well as about the advisability of expansion to fresh projects like the proposed project at Jaitapur, Maharashtra. Jaitapur is known to be in a seismic zone, and is on the coastline. India has already suffered one tsunami, which reportedly caused damage to the nuclear plant at Kalpakkam.

The Maharashtra Government has promptly got former Atomic Energy Commission Chairperson Anil Kakodkar to give a presentation to the state Assembly, at which he assured that existing nuclear plants were safe, and that the Jaitapur plant was safe from a tsunami. On what basis can Kakodkar make such a declaration? He speculates that Jaitapur's elevation makes a tsunami 'unlikely.' But natural calamities are calamities precisely because they strike without clear warning, and preparedness and precaution consist in factoring in the 'unlikely'!

Kakodkar tells us there is “no need to doubt” reactors of the government-owned French company Areva, which are to be commissioned at Jaitapur. How can Kakodkar vouch for the Areva design, which is known to be new and untested anywhere in the world? The unseemly haste with which such assurances are being touted is highly irresponsible, and must not be allowed to divert the country’s attention from the demand for a thorough review of India’s existing nuclear facilities and the proposals for further expansion.

The Prime Minister has promised both houses of Parliament that a review will be conducted to “ensure that (India’s) nuclear reactors would be able to withstand the impact of large natural disasters such as tsunamis and earthquakes.” The question is, how can we be sure that this review will be impartial, given that India lacks any independent nuclear regulatory body? The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board in India is subservient to and answerable to the very institution it is supposed to regulate - the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)! Regulatory processes are shrouded in secrecy and the Indian public are restricted by draconian legislation like the Indian Atomic Energy Act 1962 even from asking questions.

A Gopalakrishnan, former chairman, AERB has pointed out that the “collusion” between the PMO, the Indian nuclear establishment and corporate houses in the wake of the Indo-US Nuke Deal, and opined that the “continuity of this closeness between corporate houses interested in nuclear power and the concerned supervisory government agencies is distorting and damaging the independent government decisions to be taken in the public interest, whether it be in the choice of import of reactors and their cost, the environmental impact of such imported reactors or their potential deficiencies and dangers.”

We have seen how Union Carbide-Dow succeeded in influencing government and even judicial processes at Bhopal. We have also seen how so-called regulatory bodies in the case of Bt Brinjal and soft drink industry were infiltrated in a big way by people who were on the payroll of the very same MNCs like Monsanto, Coke, Pepsi etc that they were supposed to assess and regulate! The Nuke Liability Bill passed by Parliament as it bore the marks of severe pressure by the US nuclear industry backed by the US Government. This legislation means that in the event of a nuclear disaster in India, the lion’s share of the costs of clean-up and repair will be borne by India while the human cost of life and health will be borne, as at Bhopal, by the Indian people.

Japan reminds us that the scale of a nuclear disaster is likely to be far more vast and far-reaching than other industrial disasters. If the pressures of corporate and MNC interests as well as the UPA Government’s commitments to the US or France are allowed to influence the review process, then the fallout could well turn out to be devastation and disaster borne by the people of India. It is therefore absolutely urgent and imperative that a thorough and independent, time-bound review and reassessment take place of India’s existing nuclear installations, and a moratorium declared forthwith on all future nuclear projects in India including the one at Jaitapur.

## **Thousands March to Parliament under the banner of AILC**

**Thousands March to Parliament under the banner of All India Left Coordination (AILC) to demand ‘UPA Government Quit Power!’ for Soaring Prices, Mega Scams, Assault on Democracy**

On 14 March, thousands of people from all over the country marched through the streets of Delhi to Parliament demanding that the UPA Government quit in light of unprecedented corruption, backbreaking price rise, rampant unemployment and assault on people’s movements. The ‘People’s March to Parliament’ was organized by the All India Left Coordination (AILC), a platform comprising

four Left parties - the CPI(ML) Liberation, CPM Punjab, Left Coordination Committee (Kerala) and Lal Nishan Party (Leninist) Maharashtra. For two consecutive days prior to the 14<sup>th</sup>, rallyists from various states thronged the Capital city to participate in the March. On 14 March, the procession - well decorated with red banners and flags, colourful festoons and placards and reverberating with slogans demanding 'UPA Government Quit Power' - marched from the Ramlila Grounds at 11 am. Participants in the March were from all over the country including Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The procession culminated in a mass meeting at Parliament Street where a big dais was put up.

The mass meeting began with rousing revolutionary songs against corruption, rendered by the Jharkhand Sanskritik Manch (Prerna). Senior leaders, leaders from various states of the four parties graced the dais. The main speakers at the meeting were the main leaders of the constituent parties - Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary of the CPI(ML), Comrade Mangat Ram Pasla, General Secretary of the CPM Punjab, Comrade Bhim Rao Bansode, Secretary of Lal Nishan Party (Leninist), and Comrade Hariharan from LCC (Kerala). The meeting was also addressed by Comrades Vinod Singh (CPIML's MLA in Jharkhand), Krishna Adhikari (CPIML Leader from UP), Harkanwal (CPM Punjab), Mahendra Chaudhary (CPIML's Rajasthan State Secretary), Uday Bhatt (LNP-L, Maharashtra), Bhagwant Samao (CPIML, Punjab) and peasant leader Rajaram Singh (CPIML, Bihar) among other left leaders of the four parties. The mass meeting was presided over by a presidium consisting of the leaders from the four left parties which included Comrades Rameshwar Prasad (CPIML), Rajendra Baooke (LNP-L), Vimla (LCC-Kerala) and Ratanlal Randhawa (CPM Punjab). The proceedings were conducted by Comrade Swapan Mukherjee, Central Committee member of CPI(ML). The sea of demonstrators was welcomed by Delhi State Committee member Com. Ravi Rai.

Addressing the meeting, Comrade Dipankar Bhattacharya, General Secretary of the CPI(ML) Liberation said that the UPA Government which had claimed to be a government of the aam aadmi had proved to be a Government of corporate looters and scamsters. The Government has been caught red-handed colluding with corporate agents to allow the billionaire Ambanis, Mittals, Tatas etc to loot the country's land, minerals, oil, gas, spectrum and other resources and bleed the country's treasury through black money, and then appointing a tainted CVC in a bid to ensure the cover-up of these scams. Those protesting against this plunder - be they ordinary peasants and tribals or intellectuals like Binayak Sen - are being branded as 'seditious' and subjected to severest repression. The Congress-led UPA Government and the Prime Minister have no moral authority to rule and the people of the country demand that they quit.

Comrade Dipankar said that while the Government was mired in corruption, the main opposition too was unable to offer any alternative. BJP-NDA ruled states, be it Jharkhand or Karnataka, presented the same story of Governments in liaison with mining mafia. He said that on the same day as the March to Parliament in Delhi, the CPI(ML) was holding a March to the Assembly in Karnataka, the BJP-ruled state infamous for a CM mired in land scam and BJP Ministers who are mining mafia. Pointing out that the policy regime of liberalization-privatisation was responsible for the unprecedented crisis of inflation, unemployment and corruption, the time had come to punish and oust those responsible for this crisis and demand a reversal of the disastrous anti-people policies. He said that the All India Left Coordination (AILC) platform had been formed to offer a fighting Left alternative to the people in the current crisis.

Addressing the meeting, Comrade Mangat Ram Pasla, General Secretary of CPM Punjab said that the same Government that is subsidizing billionaire CEOs to the tune of lakhs of crores is slashing spending on agriculture and subsidies on food, fertilizers and fuel and pushing farmers to commit desperate acts like suicide and burdening the starving poor with ever-increasing inflation and agricultural crisis. Such a Government had lost its right to rule, he said and demanded that the UPA

Government step down without delay. He said that the Akali-NDA Government of Punjab too was unleashing agrarian crisis and severe repression on the peasants and poor of the state. While the need of the hour was for a powerful Left assertion against corporate loot, corruption and repression, it was unfortunate that the CPI(M)-led Left Front too had instead chosen to facilitate corporate land grab and unleash repression at Singur and Nandigram. In this backdrop, he said the AILC had proved to be an important platform to unite the forces of struggling Left and launch a united resistance to corrupt and anti-people governments and policies.

Comrade Bhimrao Bansode of Maharashtra reminded how Congress leaders of Maharashtra had shamefully connived with top army officials to steal the land allotted to Kargil martyrs' families in the Adarsh scam. He reminded that the UPA Government had appointed the same man as agriculture minister who presided over the record number of farmers' suicides in Maharashtra! In Raigad, people had successfully resisted a land grab attempt by Mukesh Ambani's Reliance, but in Jaitapur in the Konkan region, peasants and fisherpeople resisting the proposed atomic power plant were facing wholesale arrests and repression. He said that the explosion of the nuclear power plant in the wake of the tsunami and quake in Japan had proved that the protests of the Konkan's people had a solid basis and the Government could not be allowed to play with the lives and livelihood of the people.

Comrade Hariharan, Convenor of LCC (Kerala) said that the Congress-led UPA Government at the Centre had shamelessly persisted in appointing PJ Thomas, tainted in the Kerala palmolein scam as well as the telecom scam, to head the country's apex anti-corruption body. When the SC intervened to prevent this, the Prime Minister said he took responsibility for this 'error of judgement.' Comrade Hariharan said that the Prime Minister and Government responsible for this must quit without any delay. He pointed out that unfortunately in Kerala, even the CPI(M)-led LDF Government had its share of corruption allegations, and had acted to shield its accused leader. He declared the intention of LCC (Kerala) to contest the forthcoming elections in Kerala on the plank of a powerful anti-corruption campaign.

The massive assembly of people passed 9 resolutions proposed at the end:

1) Two decades of liberalization, privatization and globalization policies have landed the country in all-round crisis. Relentlessly rising prices are pauperizing the common people while mega scams and growing black money are robbing the national exchequer. Instead of controlling prices and punishing the corrupt, the UPA government is bent upon protecting the guilty and harassing honest and upright people. The Government shamelessly tried to appoint the tainted PJ Thomas as the CVC. When prevented by the Court, PM Manmohan Singh said he took responsibility for this 'error.' There is only one way to take responsibility for such an encouragement of corruption - the UPA Government must accept that it has lost the right to remain in power, and must resign immediately. This Mass Meeting demands that the UPA Government quit power, and also resolves to launch a nationwide agitation for urgent reversal of the policies of liberalization-privatisation-globalisation that are resulting in unprecedented price rise, unemployment and corruption.

2) The Budget this year not only does nothing to curb inflation, it slashes subsidies on food, fuel and fertilizer and therefore further burdens the toiling masses and rural poor. But the same Budget, by cuts in surcharge, and by giving total tax concessions to corporates and the super-rich in the past year to the tune of over Rs. 5 lakh crore, effectively subsidises the corporate class. The disinvestment target has been doubled to Rs 40000 cr. It is obvious that the Government is not prepared to back its promises of food security with actual budgetary allocation for PDS coverage. The meeting resolves that a Government that promotes the interests of corporate houses at the cost of the aam aadmi must go, and resolves to intensify the struggle for effective measures to curb inflation and ensure food security for all.

3) The UPA Government's tenure has seen one mega-scam after another in every sector of the economy. In these scams, the country's precious natural resources - land, minerals, oil, telecom spectrum, all are being looted by corporates with the complicity and connivance of influential people manning different institutions in the country, including the army as well as judiciary and even media. The Radia tapes have shown us how the corporates have a stranglehold on the entire system - be it selection of Ministers, national policies and decisions, court judgements or media stories. On the one hand, it is the policy regime of liberalization-privatization-globalisation (LPG) that is responsible for this scale of corruption and corporate loot. On the other, not only is the anti-corruption machinery in the country toothless, the Government also further renders it ineffective by appointing pliant people - as in the latest instance of CVC appointment. This meeting therefore resolves to demand a decisive change in the LPG policy regime as well as the speedy enactment of transparent, democratic and effective anti-corruption legislation on the lines of the Jan Lokpal Bill as drafted by eminent members of civil society.

4) All over the country we are witnessing an all-out assault on democracy. People's movements challenging corporate land grab have met with severe repression, be it at Kalinganagar, POSCO, Srikakulam or Singur and Nandigram. Operation Green Hunt has proved to be a witch-hunt, with rights activists and intellectuals like Binayak Sen who act as voices of conscience being jailed for 'sedition.' Even courts have proved to make a mockery of the law and deliver political judgements in such cases. There are hundreds of poor people and activists who are facing a similar fate - for instance the 14 CPI(ML) activists who have been jailed under TADA, when the possession of Marxist literature was the only 'proof' of terrorist intent! Draconian laws like the TADA, AFSPA, CSPA have resulted in an undeclared Emergency in the country, and innocents are being killed in fake encounters daily. This meeting demands the scrapping of the sedition law and other draconian laws, release of Binayak Sen and other activists arrested under these laws, and an end to Operation Green Hunt.

5) Around Rs 240 crore worth of black money flows out of the country every single day. A handful of the super-rich bleed the country's veins to stash away these immense amounts of ill-gotten gains in Swiss banks. Not only has the UPA Government shown no will whatsoever to bring back this wealth to the country's coffers, it has actually left wide open the routes for this plunder by signing Double Taxation Avoidance Agreements with tax havens like Mauritius. This meeting demands that every rupee of black money be brought back to the country, and every route for this plunder be plugged without an instant's delay.

6) Women's rights in India are under increasing attack. Uttar Pradesh has witnessed a spate of crimes against women including rapes by several MLAs of the ruling BSP. In Bihar, a woman raped by a BJP MLA was driven by police inaction to take the desperate measure of stabbing him. In Delhi, on Women's Day itself, a young college girl was shot dead. All over the country, young couples are being killed for choosing their own partners. Governments have shown their lack of political will to punish perpetrators of crimes against women. Even courts have often proved insensitive - in a recent instance the Supreme Court let off three gang-rapists on the payment of Rs 50000 each, while many court verdicts have proved lenient towards perpetrators of honour killings. This meeting salutes the legacy of International Women's Day on the occasion of its centenary year, and extends solidarity to the women's movement in its ongoing struggle for equality, dignity and rights.

7) Aseemanand's confession has revealed beyond doubt the role of the RSS and Sangh Parivar outfits in a series of terrorist acts that took the lives of innocents - including the blasts at Malegaon, Ajmer Sharif, Mecca Masjid and Samjhauta Express. Many of these terrorists from the Sangh camp have been people known to be close to top BJP leaders including Advani and Modi. It is a matter of great concern that even army officials have been found to be part of this saffron terror network, providing arms as well as training. In many of the cases innocent Muslim youth faced unfair arrest

and torture for the crimes committed by the saffron brigade. This meeting demands a ban on the communal fascist RSS which is the fountainhead of communal violence and saffron terror. It also demands a thorough investigation to reveal the entire network of saffron terror and its linkages with the BJP leadership. The meeting also demands immediate release of, as well as adequate compensation for, all the unfairly implicated Muslim youth.

8) This meeting expresses deep sorrow at the devastation caused to the people of Japan by the earthquake and tsunami followed by the explosion at the Fukushima nuclear reactor. The explosion in the nuclear reactor bears out the apprehensions and concerns about the safety of civilian nuclear power projects in India as well. This meeting demands a thorough and independent review and reassessment of India's nuclear programme in the light of safety standards, costs and performance of all existing reactors in India. It further demands a moratorium on the construction of any new nuclear plants including the one at Jaitapur, Maharashtra, which is based on a hitherto untested design.

9) This meeting congratulates the people of Yemen, Tunisia and Egypt for the popular uprisings that successfully ousted US-backed dictatorial regimes that had ruled for several decades. We welcome this mood of popular awakening on the questions of unemployment, price rise, corruption, trade union rights and democratic rights, that is spreading across the Arab world. We are sure that these will inspire the people's movements on these issues in India too. While hailing these uprisings however, this meeting expresses concern and warns against meddling and military encirclement of Libya by the US and Nato.

On 14<sup>th</sup> March, rally dharna, and mass meeting were also held in some other states demanding that the corrupt UPA Govt must quit office. A dharna was held at Raipur, Chhattisgarh; and a march to Karnataka Assembly at Bangalore, and also well attended protests in various parts of Andhra Pradesh- Kakinada, Vijaywada, Ananthpur, Jangareddygudam, and other places. In West Bengal, protests were held on 11 March at all districts on the same issues, also propagating about the rally in Delhi. In Tamil Nadu solidarity meetings for March 14 People's March were held. On March 12 a public meeting was held in Ambattur. Candidates of the forthcoming assembly elections Comrades S Janakiraman (Madhavaram), K Palanivel (Ambattur), A Socrates (Sripeumbudur) were introduced in the meeting. A public meeting was held in Madhavaram constituency on March 13. Kumarapalayam candidate Com.Venkatachalam was introduced in the public meeting held in Kumarapalayam on March 14. Mettupalayam Candidate Com. R Janakiraman was introduced in the public meeting held in Karamadai. Com. S Kumarasami, CPI(ML)'s PB member addressed all these meetings.

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