

The Emerging Japan-India Relationship: Nuclear Anachronism, Militarism and Growth Fetish 新興の日印関係—核アナクロニズム、軍国主義、成長固執

P K Sundaram

The emerging India-Japan relationship has been met with extreme reactions - from enthusiasm and protests in India and Japan, to concern in China. This new "strategic partnership," and particularly the nuclear cooperation under negotiation, does not portend well for Asia. P K Sundaram, a strong advocate of better relations between the people of India and Japan, tells us why.

Strong ties between India and Japan can be seen as a pre-requisite for the emergence of Asia and could, in the context of a broader Asian regionalism, provide a way out of the morass created by a 20th century dominated by the West: militarism and wars, ecological crises and growth-obsessed economies. However, the current architecture of the bilateral relationship is centered on increased joint military initiatives and negotiations of civil nuclear cooperation and partnership for corporate-centric economic growth in India that is unleashing horror on its rural poor and ruining its fragile ecosystems. In particular, absent a change in course, it will fuel an anachronistic drive for nuclear energy in India, which is being imposed by the government through brutal repression amid massive peaceful protests by its farmers, fishermen and citizens.

Contours of the partnership

The Indian PM's visit to Tokyo last in late May

2013 was part of a decade-long "strategic and global partnership" between India and Japan. Excepting 2012, the Prime Ministers of the two countries have met every year since 2006 and Japan is the only partner with whom India has a consistent 2+2 dialogue between the Foreign and Defence Secretaries. The US-India-Japan trilateral track-2 strategic dialogue shortly [preceded](#) the Indian PM's visit. The current framework of India-Japan relations has four major implications:

1) **Regional balance and stability in Asia:** the current phase of close India-Japan relations is animated by a shared strategic agenda of encircling and countering China. The recent visit became more significant following heightened tensions with China over the latter's alleged incursion in Ladakh. Before the current border tensions, India and Japan had [last year](#) launched joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean. Joint exercises between the Coast Guards of India and Japan were also held in Chennai in January 2012, and in Tokyo Bay in November 2012. Enhanced naval and maritime cooperation figures prominently in the [joint statement](#) issued last week. The strategic partnership between India and Japan spans a wide range of issues - from war in Afghanistan to the extended ASEAN security

dialogues. While the two partners maintain that the maritime cooperation is for tackling piracy and ensuring safe commerce on the seas, China has considered it a threat to its interests in the Indian Ocean and part of the larger US strategy to encircle China.



Singh and Abe May 2013

International experts have warned against the perils of such efforts to contain China. Evan Resnick [writes](#): “The continued conjunction of an increasingly powerful China with an ever more tightly-drawn US defence perimeter surrounding it poses a serious risk to peace and stability in East Asia. The Cold War case study imparts that the effective long-term containment of a rising adversary may paradoxically necessitate some accommodation of that state’s most urgent security concerns.” This growing rivalry has also accelerated China's increased closeness with Pakistan, which includes providing more reactors and the construction of the China-Pakistan corridor [through](#) what India considers Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). Chinese premier Li Keqiang visited Pakistan immediately after India this month, and spoke of a [new vigor](#) in their bilateral relations. Pakistan felt humiliated by India being given selective entry into global nuclear commerce facilitated by the

US in 2008, amounting to a legitimization of India's nuclear weapons. Pakistan continues to face an international embargo on nuclear commerce and its non-cooperation on several issues stems from this setback.

Finalizing a civil nuclear commerce agreement with Japan, together with the purchase of US-2 Japanese military aircraft, are among the key points in the negotiations. While in his last visit to Japan in 2010 the Indian PM [said that](#) he “will not force” Japan to export nuclear technology to India, this time, prior to Singh’s visit, the Abe government announced that it is committed to a nuclear partnership with India.

The agreement has been in the pipeline for several years and has faced strong opposition from the pro-disarmament constituency in Japan, animated by post-war peace sentiments. However the India-Japan nuclear deal and the current framework for strategic ties between the two countries deserves a wider critique as it has very serious implications on multiple levels.

2) Final blow to a nuclear non-proliferation regime guaranteeing nuclear profits:

One of the key components of the multi-layered bilateral dialogue is negotiating a civil nuclear agreement with India. Besides allowing access to Japanese technology for its civilian nuclear facilities, the nuclear agreement is also crucial for US and French nuclear corporations. Their projects, worth billions of dollars, are stuck because certain crucial components for those reactors have to be supplied by Japanese companies - which cannot happen without a bilateral nuclear agreement between India and Japan. Such a bilateral agreement is important for the US since its

major nuclear corporations, Westinghouse and General Electric (GE), are now owned by the Japanese companies Toshiba and Hitachi. Hence, both the US and France have been [pushing Japan](#) to enter into a nuclear agreement with India.

However, Japan's decision to reward a country that has conducted nuclear tests and is continuously advancing its nuclear arsenal and delivery systems would be a fatal blow to the nonproliferation regime and would further reduce prospects for global disarmament. At a time when there are intense international pressures to prevent Iran from acquiring advanced civil nuclear capabilities as a serious threat to the proliferation regime, this would extend an India-US nuclear deal under which the US steered selective exemption for India from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) rules in 2008 (these prohibit the supply of nuclear technology to non-signatories of the NPT). In fact, the NSG evolved out of the international response after India conducted its first nuclear tests in 1974 with the material and expertise it acquired from Canada, US, France and other countries under the rubric of the “peaceful” use of nuclear energy.

When US trade restrictions on India imposed in the aftermath of India's second nuclear tests in 1998 started hurting the US more than India, the US gradually shifted course and began calling India a “responsible” nuclear power. The United States mainstreamed India's nuclear status under a deal between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President George W Bush; India understood the US compulsion of keeping India aligned with the American global war of terror. In practical terms, India outmaneuvered the decades old international consensus on nuclear commerce by using the attraction of its emerging market and middle class consumer base, the importance of its strategic support to the West,

and by offering lucrative reactor deals in return - 10,000 MW each to the US and French, openly doled out on the eve of the NSG negotiations.

The Japanese government at that time highlighted the irony of the India-US nuclear entente but finally gave in to US pressure and supported India's exemption in the NSG. Japanese civil society, particularly peace organizations and associations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki victims, expressed strong reservations. Hibakusha groups condemned the Japanese government for buckling under pressure:

“Despite the history of the atomic bombing, the government of Japan accepted the US-India Nuclear Agreement, which affords exceptional treatment for India, without even making an effort to minimize the blow to the NPT system. In doing so, it ignored statements issued by groups representing hibakusha (A-bomb sufferers) living in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, by the Mayors of both these cities, by the Governors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Prefectures, by local councils and prefectural assemblies, as well as the united calls of Hibakusha groups, nuclear disarmament groups and other peace groups throughout Japan which for years have been striving for nuclear disarmament. The government also ignored recent cross-party expressions of opposition by members of the Japanese Diet. As citizens of the country that was attacked by nuclear weapons, we are overwhelmed with shame that we have such a government.”

However, the Japanese government has been maneuvering to finalize a nuclear agreement with India. Beside the pressures from the US and France mentioned above, the commercial interests of its own nuclear companies are another essential factor, particularly after their huge financial losses due to the Fukushima accident and the idling of most of Japan's reactors.

As in response to the Indo-US nuclear deal, Japanese hibakusha and peace groups have opposed a Japan-India nuclear agreement. The 2010 Nagasaki Peace Declaration noted a Japan-India nuclear deal will strengthen the race to militarization and heighten the risk of nuclear war in Asia: “a nation that has suffered atomic bombings itself is now severely weakening the NPT, which is beyond intolerable.”

India, which cut a deal with the US and nuclear agreements from France, Russia and other countries without signing the CTBT, is reluctant to do so with Japan. Reportedly, India even denied inclusion of a test ban clause in the bilateral nuclear agreement, which would fall short of an internationally binding CTBT. All that India is offering is a voluntary declaration of a moratorium on nuclear tests (and lucrative contracts to Japanese firms). In the recent joint statement, while Abe Shinzo stressed the importance of CTBT, Manmohan Singh reiterated his insistence on the voluntary moratorium. Mainstream Japanese newspapers have discussed the irony of Japan choosing between the progress of its economy and nonproliferation and held that both are equally important, however, the conservative Yomiuri Shimbun has unequivocally supported the nuclear agreement and [called it](#) a 'key to boosting bilateral ties.’’ Differing views on CTBT has been [pointed out](#) in the media as the reason for the failure to conclude a nuclear agreement during Singh’s visit. Despite the positive cacophony before the Japan trip, the complete absence of the word “nuclear” from the Indian PM's speech in Tokyo on 27th May signalled his realization of the difficulties faced by the LDP.

However, there is [widespread speculation](#) that the Japanese government will abandon its insistence on honoring the CTBT and finalize the agreement with India once the Liberal Democratic Party returns to power with a stronger mandate after the upcoming July

elections.

In this 15th year since India's 1998 nuclear tests, the legitimization of nuclear weapons by Japan would set a bad precedent for other countries and would boost the nuclear and conventional arms race in South Asia. Contrary to initial claims that nuclear weapons would bring strategic stability to South Asia, India’s defence budget has [gone up](#) from Rs. 35,277 crore in 1998 to a whopping 2,03,671.1 crore in 2013 accelerating a regional arms race. According to a SIPRI report [published](#) in March, India this year became the world's largest importer of arms. The modernization of nuclear arsenals and the diversification of delivery systems is also proceeding unabated in the region. A Japan-India nuclear deal will strengthen the race to militarization and heighten the risk of nuclear war in Asia.

3) Fuelling India's nuclear energy expansion

The bargain legitimizing India's nuclear weapons in return for its purchase of reactors from the US, Russia, France and now Japan has translated into horror for the common people of India. While the India-US nuclear deal was touted as a convergence of the world’s oldest and biggest democracies, the Government of India is repressing large, grassroots anti-nuclear movements and ignoring the voices of village-level democratically elected bodies. India has plans to build at least 20 more reactors in the next 20-30 years, and has announced ambitious plans to produce 25% of its total electricity by nuclear power - a 100 fold expansion compared to its present nuclear capacity. This expansion has threatened people with displacement

and the loss of livelihood, radiation and threats to health and safety, and the forcible acquisition of agricultural land and irreversible damage to fragile ecosystems in several parts of the country.

Popular protests on the issue of nuclear power in India have stemmed from three concerns: livelihood issues for the Indian poor, the inherent dangers of nuclear reactors and fears of an accident after Chernobyl and Fukushima, and the complete lack of transparency, accountability and efficiency of the Indian nuclear establishment.

Movements in every part of the country have risen in protest. Koodankulam on the southernmost tip, Mithivirdi on the West Coast, Kovvada on the East, Chutka in the middle of the country, Gorakhpur close to the capital, and Domiasiat in the far Northeast (which is being eyed by the nuclear establishment for uranium mining). Protests in all of these places have been intense yet remarkably peaceful. People at the grassroots, including large numbers of women and children, have deployed non-violent forms of resistance over several years.



Villagers marching in protest at reactors at Koodankulam

Mass hunger strikes lasting several days, the peaceful siege of construction sites, sea-borne protests by fishermen on their boats, and thousands of people standing in the sea, are among the images that have been etched into our memory by the protests in Koodankulam.



Fishermen protest peacefully near the reactor in boats with black flags

The Indian state, in stark contrast, has repeatedly resorted to brutal repression against the people. In response to protests, thousands of policemen surrounded the villages in Koodankulam for several days cutting off essential supplies including food and medicines, flying planes above protesting

people to intimidate them, killing fishermen in Jaitapur and Koodankulam with indiscriminate firing and baton-charges, ransacking houses and destroying fishing boats.



Police enter Idinthikar and beat peaceful demonstrators

These are among the *televised* instances of state violence against dissenting people. Going further, the Indian government slapped colonial-vintage police charges of “sedition” and “war against the Indian state” on tens of thousands of villagers in Koodankulam. The passports of many youth in the region, who work as migrant labor in the Arabian Gulf, were impounded. The Prime Minister himself indulged in the demonization of the protests calling them “foreign funded.” International activists and journalists, including three Japanese nationals trying to visit Koodankulam, have been deported. While international [surveys](#) have showing popular disapproval of nuclear energy the world over, the Indian government sent psychological therapists to “counsel” protesting villagers in complete contempt for people's intelligence. The government has also refused to make public basic documents related to safety and the site-selection of Koodankulam and other reactors.

The Supreme Court of India has recently given a go ahead to the Koodankulam reactors, overlooking the blatant violations of the

regulator's own norms. *The Court's verdict rests on three hugely contested premises: the judges' belief in the necessity of nuclear energy for India's progress, their faith in the country's nuclear establishment to responsibly perform its role, and the judges' notion of the larger public interest amidst the apprehensions of small sections of people who they believe should make way for the country's progress. Not only have the judges given judicial sanctity to these contestable propositions, they have also completely overlooked the Koodankulam-specific violations of safety norms raised by the petitioners. This is perhaps the world's only reactor being commissioned without an independent assessment of its environmental impact, without a natural source of fresh water, with thousands of people living a mere 700 metres from the reactor, and without accommodating the post-Fukushima lessons about the risk of housing the spent fuel pool in the main reactor building.*

Proposed reactor projects in other places are being punished for violating such norms. The French EPR-design being implemented in Jaitapur is untested and has run into 100% cost over-runs in Finland, the only place where these new reactors are being built. It's cost in India is expected to [triple](#). The Finnish regulator has taken Areva to court for safety violations and for undermining the terms of agreement. The four reactors being built in Gorakhpur near New Delhi have almost no water source. The small canal intended to provide water to cool these reactors ran completely dry earlier this year.

There are serious problems in the functioning of the Indian nuclear industry. India has a history of missing its nuclear power production targets miserably. Not only has it been inefficient, it has been marked with [dangerous accidents](#), cover-ups and [gross violations](#) of best practice standards. This includes the hiring of casual workers for radiation-related work, employing them without adequate safety

gear, training or health insurance, and [getting away](#) with impunity in cases of accident. Its nuclear regulator, the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, is a toothless body that is dependent on the same Department of Atomic Energy for funds and expertise that it is designed to regulate.

Japan's attempt to compensate for financial losses incurred from the Fukushima accident and to spur its own troubled nuclear power industry by selling technology to other countries is very unfortunate. Japan is seeking to enter new nuclear markets in Turkey, Vietnam, Jordan, India, Bangladesh, UAE, Brazil and Saudi Arabia. Japanese corporations like Mitsubishi, Hitachi and Toshiba are slated to gain huge profits through these deals. However these countries lack a nuclear safety culture and trained human resources, nor do they have significant experience in running nuclear facilities safely and accountably. Japan is also considering setting up a nuclear [waste repository](#) in Mongolia that has been fiercely opposed by local people. Japan's policy to rehabilitate its nuclear corporations by promoting nuclear exports has been criticized domestically. In a recent editorial the Japan Times [wrote](#):

“Mr. Abe is trying to promote the export of nuclear technology at a time when the nuclear crisis at Tokyo Electric Power Co.'s Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant remains ongoing and many Fukushima residents still live in fear of exposure to radioactive substances released by the plant. Some 150,000 of them still cannot return to their homes and communities due to radioactive contamination. In addition, important questions concerning the cause of the Fukushima nuclear crisis have yet to be resolved despite the studies by investigation committees set up by the government and the Diet.”

4) Japan's partnership with the Indian elite's anti-people and

eco-destructive model of growth

The current 2+2 architecture of India-Japan relations prioritizes defense ties and a completely misleading and irrational model of economic “growth” over all else.

In her letter to the Japanese and Indian Prime Ministers on the eve of the agreement, Lalita Ramdas, an eminent Indian anti-nuclear and women's rights activist, [wrote](#):

“we want you to use this opportunity to welcome the assistance and collaboration with our Japanese friends in finding practical solutions and making the investments so necessary in renewable energy - especially solar and wind. Recent press reports [speak of](#) the Green Phoenix rising from the Ashes. Their aim is to be totally self sufficient from renewable sources alone in Fukushima Prefecture by 2040. Imagine that India, China and Japan could together transform the global energy scenario into a safer, cleaner and certainly greener future. This could be a wonderful moment for Asia and one on which there is need for powerful, independent and collective leadership!”

The Indian government is obsessed with achieving a 9-10% annual growth rate in coming years. However the surge in the growth rate over the last few years has been entirely jobless. In fact a recent study concluded that India has had [negative](#) job growth. The major reason is that while growth is [negative](#) in the manufacturing sector, agriculture is facing its worst crisis in India's recorded history and is

experiencing a sharp decline. Indian farmers' suicides is the only thing growing in its agriculture sector: the government's own data acknowledges that at least 270,940 Indian farmers **have taken their lives** since 1995 - after the neoliberal economic reforms picked up pace. 46 farmers daily committing suicide in India is **a cruel joke** in the face of its elite's claims of the country's rise. The income gap in India is likely to become even **worse** in the coming years. This model of progress brings devastation and misery to the Indian poor, particularly to rural and tribal populations, from all directions - massive displacement and loss of livelihood threatens especially the millions of **agrarian workers** who do not own land and who work on others' fields and, hence, do not receive any compensation when the villages are acquired for "development" projects.

The current economic partnership between India and Japan would spur such a callous and nakedly lopsided "progress" in India. One such collaborative project that found prominent mention in the joint statement is an instructive case. The Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) project is a highly eco-destructive project to develop a high-speed road of 1700 kms from Delhi to Mumbai and build mega cities along this road. Thousands of villages would be displaced, land owners would make huge profits, and the agriculture in 6 states would be ruined. The DMIC would require about 10,000 hectares for the road and 20,000 hectares for the industrial zone, tearing through densely populated states and farmland. This is the biggest urbanization plan in India's history and would also mean its largest displacement of people - far more even than the bloody transfer of population during the India-Pakistan partition. To complete and sustain this project newer power plants and new mines would be required that would mean more displacement and the further erosion of India's rapidly depleting green cover. These 6 states in North India produce most of its food

grain and the farmers are largely dependent on river and groundwater. Even beyond the project area, farmers would face acute water crises since this project would suck dry their ground water and irrigation canals. A massive movement of farmers is already emerging **against** this project.

Conclusion:

Japan pursued nuclear energy vigorously in the last half of the 20th century despite being the victim of nuclear weapons, and it embraced the neoliberal model of capitalism. Both the Fukushima accident and the Japanese economy's decline over the last two decades should make it re-think the twin goals of neoliberal growth and the ongoing development of nuclear energy. India, as a developing country, is standing at a crucial threshold where it can learn from Japan and cooperate with it in the realization of a more humane economy. The two countries should cooperate in exploring a nuclear-free energy future by pooling talents, resources and technologies. India and Japan can become harbingers of comprehensive disarmament by jointly launching global initiatives rather than diluting the NPT and becoming the pawns of other's militarist interests in Asia.



People of Koodankulam praying for victims of Hiroshima

While the world is still grappling with the implications of the Fukushima meltdowns, completion of the Japan-India nuclear agreement would be anachronistic. It would strengthen the insanity of India's imposing nuclear reactors on its people against their will. It would further fuel the nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan and would provide the ultimate legitimacy for India's nuclear tests. The agreement would destabilize the Asian continent by promoting India-Japan's strategic role in encircling China. An [online appeal](#) signed by more than 2000 international citizens has called for the termination of the nuclear

agreement and a moratorium on Japan's nuclear export policy. It is time we listen to these voices of sanity.

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