

INDIA AND JAPAN: NEITHER FRIENDS NOR STRANGERS!

A Paradox of the prevailing world order is that the protagonists of World War Two dominate it. China, the USA, UK, France, Russia fought as Allies and won the war. These Five Powers [P-5] now are Permanent Members of the United Nations Security Council and wield the Veto over all crucial international decisions. Germany, Italy and Japan fought the War against the Allies as Axis Powers. They lost the War. But, all the three losers are now members of the all-powerful economic conglomerate, known as G-7. P-5 and G-7, among themselves, control, if not command, the political and economic international dispensation. Winners or losers, these war-mongering nations have realized, in a substantial measure, their war aim of conquering the world. All international institutions, such as the UN, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization are in their grip and promote their interests, irrespective of their internecine rivalries. Other countries, big or small, have to look to the P-5 and G-7 for advancing their interests. It is ironical but true that the warring nations today dictate the terms for world peace. The Victors and Vanquished of World War Two lord it over the rest of the world.

Japan lost the War in 1945 but, miraculously, became a world economic power. It has played little political or military role since. In fact, it became a post-war client State of the USA and remains so even to the extent of sending military detachments to Iraq, amid stiff domestic opposition. It can take no action in the international arena without the prior nod or goading of the USA. India was a subject country until August 15, 1947. During the World War, India counted little internationally. It had no independent foreign policy. The British, who ruled over India, were the enemies of Japan during the War. They used Indian manpower and materials for winning the War. The rebels from the Indian Army formed the Indian National Army in Singapore. India's fire-brand leader and symbol of ardent Indian patriotism, Subhash Bose, escaped from British India to Germany and from there to the Far East. Subhash Bose, popularly known and remembered as Neta Ji, compacted with Germany and Japan to fight against the British, with the avowed aim of liberating India from the British Imperialism. He lived in Japan, took command of the Indian Army, fought against the British in Burma, with Japanese support, from 1942 to August 1945, and died mysteriously in Taipei. A forgotten relic of history is the dissenting judgment and *obiter dicta* of the Indian Judge Radhabinod Pal who served on the Japa-

nese War Tribunal. He debunked virtually all evidence of Japanese atrocities that the US prosecution submitted before the War Tribunal. His observations soothed the hurt and humiliated ego of the defeated Japanese, then under American occupation.

In spite of sharing a long history of Buddhist influence and people to people contact, in spite of the Subhash Bose, Indian National Army links and popular pro-Japanese sentiment, the post war period has witnessed little significant interaction between Japan and India. The relations between the two nations began in 1952, after the USA lifted its occupation and imposed a Constitution drafted by it on Japan. As a special gesture, India had refused to attend the San Francisco Peace Conference in 1951. Instead, it signed a separate peace treaty with Japan in 1952. "This, Pandit Nehru felt, gave Japan a proper position of honour and equality among the community of free nations. In that peace treaty, India waived all reparation claims against Japan." Yet, Japanese response has never warmed up.

There have been signs of strain, at times pronounced, in their relations. The Emergency in India, India's nuclear explosions and India's inclination toward the Soviet Union were treated as irritants by the Japanese, more to conform to American position than to express its own resentment. Japanese posture toward India has veered around the US policy toward India. In the diplomatic parlance, Indo-Japanese relations have remained cool, though correct. Partly, it is due to the very different temperamental dispositions, partly due to the very different historical circumstances of these two Asian nations, enjoying at this time international importance for very different reasons.

Will the Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's State visit [April 29 and 30, 2005] to New Delhi warm up the India-Japan equation? Or, like other Prime Ministerial visits, will it prove to be a routine diplomatic, summit-level exchange? What are the prevailing indicators for the future relations between these two very distinct Asian entities who have refused to be either friends or strangers [unlike, say Russia and India or China and India] on the international plane? There have been joint declarations and announcements of Partnerships in the past, such as India-Japan Global Partnership during the former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's Delhi visit in 2000, and Japan-India Joint Declaration 2001, but with no dramatic impact on their relations. More important than such mildewed diplomatic ini-

tiatives is the emerging Asian economic pattern that neither country can ignore. According to predictions, by 2030, Japan, China and India will have the same magnitude of GDP's and, at present, hold Foreign Exchange Reserves of around US \$ 845, US \$ 610 and US \$ 141 billion, respectively. Japan's phoenix-like economic rise, loosening of the American noose around its neck, increasing influence and future potential of Asia have made Japan seek an international role as an Asian Power—if possible, independent of the USA. The impending and inevitable restructuring of the UN Security Council has brought Japan and India together in a new political dynamic. Both Asian nations are striving for the same goal, becoming contenders and co-operators in the same breath!

Trade has come to be accepted as the 21st century's panacea for all international ills. Yet, admittedly, "huge gaps ...in areas of investment, trade and tourism between Japan and India" exist, according to the Japanese Ambassador to India, Yasukuni Enoki. Japan, contrary to its public avowals, is not enthusiastic about direct investment in India. India-Japan trade is stagnating at 4 billion dollars for almost a decade now. India's economist Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has suggested setting up of a Joint Study Group instead of a practical programme for boosting bilateral trade. Contrast it with the arrangement between India and China, worked out under Vajpayee's Premiership, that has forcefully opened and livened up trade between the two countries that now stands at 13 billion US dollars—confidently predicted to reach US \$ 20 billion in 2008.

The joint statement issued in New Delhi during the Japanese Prime Minister's visit takes due note of the rapid Asian transformation and its bright future: "The two leaders are deeply aware that these developments will shape the future contour of Asian economies and politics. They also share the recognition that peace, stability and development in Asia are indispensable for world peace and development and the future of the world is intimately linked to the future of Asia" and recognize "the need for concerted efforts among Asian countries to translate the positive developments into an arc of advantage and prosperity, stability and closer integration in Asia". This is high-sounding diplomatese. There is nothing "strategic" in this joint statement. Proliferation of weapons, terrorism, environmental protection mentioned therein are universal issues and can hardly be termed as "bilateral strategic interests". Indian Prime Minister proposed Asian Economic Community, which merely echoes the European Economic Community in a general Asian context, rather than "strategic partnership" involving common stakes.

Japan is already prosperous and vies with western nations economically; its security and stability depend upon the sole superpower USA's protective umbrella firmly arched over it. Its economic and political integration with Asia is fraught with risks and uncertainties. For, China will brook no Japanese foray toward Asian dominance. Japan, therefore, feels much safer and securer as a part of G-7. If it has opted to collaborate with India for entry in the Security

Council, it appears to be a tactic to counter the Chinese opposition. In the expanded Security Council there will be room for at least two Asian powers. The USA knows that it cannot hope to balance China with Japan alone and it would be politically wise to put Japan in tandem with India. Just as Japan will have to overcome Chinese objections, India too will have to overcome objections from its neighbours, including Pakistan. And the USA will play the super broker to strike a deal that will keep India and Japan obliged, hopefully, forever. This explains India's bending over backwards to Pakistan and Japan's aligning with India for a common entry to the UN Security Council. Their support to each other will weigh with the Veto-wielding USA, France and UK, as a decisive ploy to cancel any Asian objections—whether Chinese, Pakistani or any other. Japan Premier's visit to Pakistan soon after his Indian sojourn, followed by 100 US \$ million aid is quite apropos here. Japan's closer ties with Pakistan may win Pakistani support for itself and help overcome latter's objections against India. The same way, India's good relations with Russia might help Japan to overcome Russian objections. Furthermore, despite initial effusion about the Veto, Japan is likely to readily agree to UN Security Council membership without the Veto, under US persuasion compelling India to follow suit.

Yet, Japan-India collaboration on common entry to the UN Security Council is their first major political move together on the chessboard of international politics and deserves watching. Some observers have debunked India and Japan jointly over-emphasizing their common quest for the UN Veto, instead of concentrating on more realistic mutual concerns. They think it is an ill-conceived venture, distractive of more realizable goals of trade, investment, energy, tourism, and culture and technology joint ventures.

Japan's financial assistance to India in building infrastructure and projects like cleaning the Ganga deserves mention. Japan will build \$5 billion east-west rail corridors—Delhi-Howrah and Delhi-Mumbai. It will be a high-axel load freight, multi-modal facility. Japan has already funded the Delhi Metro. Japan, victim of the American atom bomb, is sensitive to India's nuclear stance. It has, however, such good relations with all western nuclear powers that its protestations lack legitimacy. It has no excuse to shy away from nuclear-India. Not surprisingly, no specific agreements were signed during Prime Minister Koizumi's Delhi visit.

There are, no friends or foes, only interests in diplomacy. India and Japan are discovering common interests. The future of Indo-Japanese relations does not depend upon India and Japan, so much as on how Japan relates with the USA and China. While India will support any move toward a multipolar world, Japan's interests need American Superpowerism. Japan is not likely to become a political power in near future. India and Japan will have to converge their interests before becoming diplomatic friends or partners. Junichiro Koizumi's visit, though successful, marks no paradigm change in Indo-Japanese equation.