



Institute for Contemporary Chinese Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam

Authored by: **ALEENA T SABU (Pondicherry University), ICCS Research Intern**

Fukushima Hypocrisy and Repercussions in China

The Chinese government has placed a ban on Japanese sea food after the latter's attempt to release water from the Fukushima power plant into the Pacific Ocean. China has called out Japan for being 'selfish' and being insensitive to environmental degradation and the possible issues that humanity will face in the long run if the Fukushima power plant releases water into the Pacific Ocean [1]. China as well as South Korea have strongly condemned Japan's plan to release nuclear waste into the Pacific Ocean. The controversy turned around against China when it was realised that China releases nuclear power plant waste which has more harmful substances than Japan does. This resulted in China being a hypocrite in the international scenario.

Japan and Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant in the Pacific Ocean

Japan, after obtaining a positive sign from the United Nations (UN) as well as the international Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has started to release small amounts of nuclear water from the Fukushima power plant [2]. The Fukushima nuclear power plant was hit by a tsunami in 2011 and this resulted in one of the worst nuclear destructions after the Chernobyl incident. After the tsunami, Electric Power (Tepco) agency which manages the plant, started to store nuclear waste water in tanks after removing the harmful substances from them. The water undergoes various procedures and ends up with carbon-14 after having removed strontium-90 and iodine-129 content in the water [3]. This water was stored in containers for the past decade but now Japan claims that it is finding it difficult to store the water due to lack of infrastructure and resources available and needs to release it into the Pacific Ocean, In order to take up new projects. "We confirmed that the analysed value is equal to the calculated concentration and that the analysed value is below 1,500 becquerels per litre," a Tepco spokesperson, Keisuke Matsuo, told reporters as the national safety standard is 60,000 becquerels a litre.

Japan, after seeking approval from the UN and IAEA, had started pumping water into the Pacific Ocean. This has triggered several reactions around the globe. China and South Korea had voiced their concerns previously when Japan had proposed their idea. China remains head strong on the issue and wants Japan to cut back due to fear of long-term implications of nuclear waste in the ocean.

Fear and Repercussions

Not only the Chinese government and its people have been against it, but people in Tokyo have also been divided on the issue. There also have been attacks on the Japanese embassy in South Korea. In fear of the sea water being filled with radioactive contaminants the nuclear plant release China had imposed a ban on Japanese seafood from 10 regions and South Korea have also imposed a ban on seafood coming from the Fukushima region, with rigorous check on the current import of sea food from Japan [4]. There have been protests by people in South Korea, China as well as within Tokyo. The Japanese based Citizens' Nuclear Information Centre explains that the Japanese government have not investigated the long-term effects of this issue and that there is a lack of scientific research into this matter.

The fishermen are in fear of the economic meltdown they will face as most of the sea food is exported from Japan because of its high quality, in fact, half of Japan's sea food industry caters to China and Hongkong alone. When China imposed a ban, it hoped it would crush Japan with it, but reports say that Japan's sea food industry hardly contributes to its economy. Sea food exports to Japan only account for 1% of its global trade. Japanese industry is dominated by cars and their production. So, the ban will hardly affect Japan and would have serious repercussions in China as their sole importer is being cut off [5].

This issue has also created a situation of panic amongst people, so much that the Chinese people are buying salt in large quantities and hoarding it. This is essentially because they believe that iodine in the salt will help against the radioactive materials in the sea food. The Chinese people's belief in such a system had created a panic and people feared sea food. Vendors at the market explain how there have been fewer buyers after the announcement by the Japanese government [6].

The Chinese Hypocrisy

China has been vocal about this issue from its onset and has gone to lengths in calling out call the Japanese for their inhumane actions. What is notable here is how China is also dumping nuclear waste into the Pacific Ocean on a regular basis, which is more harmful than the water dumped by Japan. Water released by power plants on a normal basis in China, South Korea and Taiwan has higher amounts of tritium than water released by Japan. The Chinese have been called into hypocritical for their actions.

The Chinese spokesperson explained that the water released from Japan is more harmful because of the nuclear disaster that happened in Japan while the water from nuclear power plants in China is not that harmful. China has notably been looking for ways to potentially corner Japan and that was evident in this scenario because when the Chinese Foreign Affairs

minister was asked why it had not placed a ban on sea food from Russia and South Korea as pollution is evident in these sea areas too [7]. The minister remained silent in addressing those issues and went on to explain how Japan will contribute to an ecological catastrophe.

The Chinese and Japanese people have long standing issues in their diplomatic relations- Japan has always sought the US as its main ally and has also tried to link India against Chinese aggression in the South Asian region. Recently, Japan, South Korea and the US have signed an agreement to strengthen their relationship against China's growing power [8]. For China to emerge as a key player, it needs to ground itself in South Asia. For this to happen it needs to counter both India and Japan. The Japanese presence also signals US power in the Asian region, and China hence uses every chance it gets to counter Japan and this sea food ban is only one amongst them.

References

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