

Treaty with Japan may legalize dumping toxic waste in India

Environmental groups and NGOs in India are up in arms against a coming India-Japan treaty regarding the export of old Japanese ships and toxic chemicals to Indian shipyards.

The India-Japan Economic Agreement is in the final stages of discussion and is due to be formalised in October.

Another contentious issue is the amount of electronic and machinery waste that comes into India from Japan.

Currently, soft loans to India from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and grants from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) range between \$25 million-\$33 million a year.

JICA is in the process of finalising ways of implementing collaborations and utilising Japan's Special Terms for Economic Partnership (STEP) scheme with Japanese technology and expertise.

Imports from Japan stand at about \$4 billion a year. India has been one of the largest recipients of Japan's Overseas Development Assistance totalling about \$1.2 billion.

Activists here say that Japan, on the pretext of 'expertise in recycling', is dumping its toxic waste into countries like India.

Chennai-based campaign groups, the Corporate Accountability Desk and Exnora International, say Japan exported nearly 2,000 tonnes of trash to India between 2003 and 2006.

This does not include the e-waste that comes in from Japan.

'If the agreements negotiated by Japan with the Philippines and Thailand are anything to go by, the India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement that is being worked on by the two governments will open the floodgates to Japan's municipal, medical and hazardous wastes,' said Nityanand Jayaraman, a member of the international coalition Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA).

'The Economic Agreement is bad news. The Indian commerce ministry has refused to part with any meaningful information regarding the ongoing negotiations claiming secrecy,' added Madhumita Dutta of the Corporate Accountability Desk.

The group has demanded that the negotiations should not liberalise waste trade and the talks should be opened up for public participation.

According to one published report, Japan exported at least 270 tonnes of toxic waste, including prohibited items such as zinc ash, lead acid battery wastes and copper cables coated with the poison plastic PVC, to India.

Specifically, Japan exported more than 500 tonnes of DDT and 20 tonnes of capacitor fluid containing polychlorinated biphenyl, a carcinogen and a banned chemical, in the last few years.

Indian laws too prohibit the import of hazardous wastes into India.

Activists believe that faced with an over-consumptive lifestyle and very little land space, the Japanese are desperate for new places to dump their wastes.

Japanese diplomats here refused to accept a memorandum registering Chennai's protest presented by civil society groups.

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