

# Japan, India & United Nations

## Reflections of a Long-term Indian Resident in Japan



Author Rabinder MALIK

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I am amazed by the twists and turns my life has taken since I was born in 1934 in a town in what is now Pakistan. My family had to move to New Delhi when India became independent and was divided into India and Pakistan in 1947. Soon after graduating from university in New Delhi, I was lucky to join the WHO (World Health Organization) and subsequently the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) and worked for these UN organizations for 15 years in India and Indonesia. I then took up a five-year assignment with a UN program for the development of infrastructure in a remote area called West Irian (Irian Jaya) in New Guinea, which had been liberated by Holland and handed over to Indonesia. It was the United Nations University (UNU) that brought me to Japan in 1976. After retirement from the UNU in 1996, I decided to stay on in Japan and have now been living here for one-third of a century.

### Arrival in Japan

I was fortunate to join the UNU soon after it established its headquarters in Tokyo. I found my work exciting and absorbing as we were involved in the setting up of a unique international academic institution dealing with human survival and development as a new organ of the United Nations. People do not realize that Tokyo is the headquarters of the UNU just as New York is the headquarters of the United Nations. The UNU headquarters is located in a magnificent building on Aoyama Street, designed by the internationally famous architect Kenzo Tange, and made available with the support of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The UNU also operates a worldwide network of research and training centers and programs. Over the years, the focus of the UNU programs has evolved, and even after 34 years of its existence, it is hard to explain what the UNU is because it is not a university in the traditional sense with faculties and students. However, efforts are currently under way to reshape it into an institution that can award degrees.

Photo: Rabinder Malik



Malik receives an award from Urayasu Mayor Hideki Matsuzaki.

### Why Is UNU Headquarters in Tokyo?

Japan regained its sovereignty and reentered the international community as an independent nation in 1952, and was admitted to the United Nations in 1956. During the post-World War II period, Japan's foreign policy actions were guided by close cooperation with the United States, a free-trade system and international cooperation through the United Nations and other multilateral bodies. These worked well and contributed to the phenomenal economic recovery and growth of Japan. By the early 1970s, Japan had become a ranking world economic power, and this generated a sense of pride and self-esteem in the country and growing support for a more prominent international role.

It was around that time that the idea of the establishment of an international university was put forward by U Thant, the then UN secretary general. Interestingly, it was Mrs. Elizabeth Rose, an American supporter of UNESCO, who suggested that it was time for Japan to host such a university as it would promote exchanges between East and West. Within Japan, strong support for this idea came from Dr. Michio Nagai, who was then an editorial writer for the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* and later became the minister of education. Dr. Nagai wrote articles and discussed this idea with his own contacts in the academic circles, who all showed great interest. There is no doubt in my mind that the final establishment of the UNU with Japanese support and with its headquarters in Tokyo was in large part due to the efforts of personalities like Dr. Nagai, Mr. Yasushi Akashi, a former Japanese diplomat and UN undersecretary general, and Mr. Hiroshi Kida, former vice minister of education.

### Japan & United Nations

Japan has always been an important member of the global community and has consistently supported the programs and activities of the United Nations. Japan has also been making substantial contributions to the promotion of human security and development and improvement of the lives of people all over the world through its generous offi-

cial development assistance (ODA). It is a reasonable question to ask as to why Japan is not a permanent member of the UN Security Council when it makes substantial contributions to the UN budget, second only to the United States and higher than those of all the other four permanent members.

The question, however, is a broader one and relates to the long-overdue reform of the Security Council, which has lost its legitimacy as the guarantor of international peace and security, especially since the Iraq war. The Security Council, whose five permanent veto-wielding members were selected in the shadow of World War II, is no longer representative of the geopolitical realities of the 21st century. How can Africa and Latin America have no permanent members? How can Asia, home to more than half of the world's population, have only one permanent seat? It is thus vital to reform the Security Council and also revitalize the General Assembly to enable the United Nations to deal more effectively with the critical global problems. The global financial crisis facing the world is the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Besides, there are other issues that cannot be ignored such as disarmament, international terrorism, poverty and disease, and the consequences of global warming and climate change that threaten to make the earth less habitable and life more hazardous. The United Nations is imperfect, but it is indispensable as it is the only global organization that plays a central role in efforts to promote world peace and prosperity.

### Life after Retirement

After retirement from the UNU, I decided to stay on in Japan but the big question was what to do after retirement. In line with the Japanese concepts of “*go-en*” (linked by fate) and “*ichigo-ichie*” (treasuring every once-in-a-lifetime encounter), I believe that our life is a series of “encounters” and chances come from meeting people. Many unexpected opportunities came my way, and I got involved with some wonderful programs and activities that have made my retired life both enjoyable and meaningful.

My objective was to pass on my knowledge and international experience to young people and to inspire them to take interest in the critical global issues that confront our world today. To achieve this purpose I taught courses on the United Nations and intercultural communication at American and Japanese universities. I currently teach a course at Keio University and it gives me great pleasure to see students showing keen interest in learning about contemporary global issues. The Japanese government's “Ship for World Youth Program” that aims to promote multicultural exchange among the world youth was a perfect fit for my background and experience, and I served twice as an adviser on board *Nippon Maru*. I was also involved with the IES “Study Abroad Program” that sends American university students to Japan to learn the Japanese language and culture and strengthen their intercultural competence.

During my long stay in Japan, I got to know Japan and Japanese people well and became an admirer of Japanese culture. I appreciate the quietness, cleanliness and kindness of the Japanese people and the egalitarian society of Japan. One cannot find another example of a society that has progressed so rapidly in attaining high levels of development and growth and creating a modern society without losing its cultural roots. My abiding interest in singing traditional Japanese *enka* (popular ballads) also helped me in understanding Japanese culture and I could perceive some similarities between the cultures of Japan and India. In 2001, I made my debut as an *enka*



CD jacket of “enka” songs by “Oyaji Gumi” (Big Buddy Trio)- Ebihara, Kinomura, Malik

singer by joining a group named “Oyaji Gumi” (Big Buddy Trio) and am now learning Japanese *min'yo* (folk songs) to further deepen my understanding of Japanese society.

### Japan-India Collaboration

As a long-term Indian resident in Japan, I am naturally interested in promoting cooperation between the two countries. India has achieved remarkable economic development and progress in information technology and other sectors. In recent years, Japanese investment in India has been growing steadily, and there are endless opportunities for business partnerships between the two countries. For example, with its huge population, rapid industrialization and development, India's energy needs are rising rapidly and this provides immense potential for technological cooperation between Japan and India, especially in the areas of energy and the environment. Collaboration in these sectors has been promoted by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), an Indian research institution that I represent in Japan since 2001. TERI is headed by Nobel peace prize winner R. K. Pachauri, chairman, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). I also serve as a board member of the Japan-India Partnership Forum (JIPF), chaired by former Indian Ambassador Aftab Seth. The forum was set up in 2007 to promote links between the two countries.

### Home Away from Home

My family has been living in Urayasu City outside Tokyo since 1981. Nowadays Urayasu is one of the fastest-growing urban centers in Japan, but when we moved there it was still a small town and people were friendly and warm-hearted and I made many new friends. In 1986, the then mayor of Urayasu asked me to become a board member of the newly formed Urayasu International Friendship Association (UIFA). One of my tasks was to advise on the establishment of the Urayasu Foreign Residents Association (UFRA), which I chaired for 17 years and now serve as its senior adviser. I feel fully integrated in the community in Urayasu, and actively participate in several social, cultural and recreational activities in the city. In recognition of my contributions to the community, Mr. Hideki Matsuzaki, mayor of Urayasu, honored me with an “Education and Culture Award” in November 2007. Urayasu feels like home away from home. **JS**

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