

DEFENCE PREPAREDNESS AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

Synopsis: The bitter memories of Indo-China war in 1962 are still fresh in our minds. There are still many gaps in our defence. In recent years our defence budget has declined sharply in comparison to that of our neighbours. China has been helping Pakistan militarily and it is a matter of great concern. There is undesirable pressure on India in the name N.P.T. and C.T.B.T. which should be resisted and nuclear options kept open. The Integrated Missile Development Programme (IMDP) should continue uninterrupted so that various missiles are inducted into our armed forces. In critical areas of defence it is high time that we rapidly indigenize. People in the uniform should be looked after well and their interests taken care of. The induction of Sukhoi aircrafts in IAF is an encouraging development.

“Let him who desires peace, prepare for war.” This seemingly contradictory statement is significant in Indian context. It is imperative that to maintain peace and calm in this subcontinent, India is well prepared and ready to face any challenge of war from across Himalayan and desert borders and the watery fronts. But according to analysts and experts there are many chinks in India's defence armour and the bitter memories of Indo-China war in 1962 still weigh heavy on Indian minds. The gaps in our defence system and capabilities; are a matter of great concern. Experts aver that it is high time that our ageing military hardware is replaced and indigenized. They are also of the opinion that our defence budget is quite inadequate to meet our defence needs. Given India's size, vast borders and security requirements the outlay on defence continues to be one of the lowest among the neighbouring countries. During the last 8 years it has slumped by over 24 per cent. It was 175.8 billion in 1992-93; 218.4 billion in 1993-1994; 235.4 billion in 1994-1995. The revised estimate of defence expenditure of the Central government. In terms of GDP, the share has come down to 2.5 per cent. The corresponding figures of Pakistan and China are quite startling. While China has hiked its defence expenditure by a whopping 125 per cent since 1990, Pakistan's military budget outlay has been consistently increased to outspend that of India three times over. In 1993 Pakistan defence expenditure was 27%.

There is threat to India's security both from Beijing and Islamabad. It is a matter of great concern that China has been constantly supplying arms and ammunitions to Pakistan. China is strengthening its defence ties further with

Pakistan by supplying it missiles, nuclear equipments and technology besides critical spare parts. China is also helping Pakistan to indigenizing its missile production with the intention to tilt the balance of power in Pakistan's favour in the subcontinent to India's anxiety and unhappiness. India can be the only potential rival of China in the south East Asia and Beijing would never like it to happen. Beijing is busy in exploiting the long and deep rooted hatred and mistrust between Delhi and Islamabad. The initiatives taken by Mr. I.K. Gujral as India's Foreign Minister in the immediate past and those likely to be taken in near future as the Prime Minister should be welcomed. These efforts now known as "Gujral Doctrine" may yield desired results. However, India cannot afford to be complacent in her defence preparedness and upgradation of military hardware.

India's security requirements cannot be taken lightly nor its defence imperatives ignored, any more. The developed and nuclear powers under the leadership of the U.S. have been unduly pressurizing India to compromise with its security challenges in the name of N.P.T. and C.T.B.T. Nuclear tests by China and France just before signing weapons within a time-frame and banning computerized simulations of nuclear explosions make their intentions suspect. Moreover, Pakistan is busy acquiring M-11 missiles, P-3 Orion aircrafts etc. with the help of China and other friendly western countries.

India should not allow the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) to cause impediments in the development of its military missiles like Prithvi, Agni, Akash, Nag etc. It has already been considerably delayed because of MTCR and idigenisations problems of certain critical components and subsystems needed for the mission. In order to ensure that Trishul, Akash and Nag missile systems are developed in shortest possible time, it is suggested that the existing linkage, with national science and technology resource should have been strengthened further and the projects being closely monitored. It deserves repetition that China has supplied Pakistan with M-11 missiles and aiding her with technology and manpower as well as the development of its indigenous missile programme. It is in response to these emerging security challenges that India should accelerate its missile development programme.

The Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) achieved remarkable progress during 1996-97 with successful flight trials of 250 km range version of Prithvi surface to surface missile for Air force. Activities subsequent to successful completion of user trial phase are in progress in respect of 150 km range version of Prithvi for the Army. One development flight trial of medium range surface-to-air-missile Akash has been successfully carried out. Desert trials of Akash, a self-propelled launcher, have been successfully

completed. In a significant development, the Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. (BHEL) has indigenously developed a ship mounted launcher for firing surface-to-air Trishul missile. It was handed over to the Indian navy and will be used for shore tests of the missile at Cochin. The launcher has the capacity to store 22 missiles including 8 Trishuls loaded in 2 packs of 4 missiles.

The first lot of three Russian build Sukhoi MK-1 war-planes arrived in India in knocked down condition in March 1997 and another 5 were to follow soon. The planes were to be assembled in India by Russian technicians and the maiden flight of top-of-the-line war planes was scheduled for early May. And these would be soon inducted in the Indian Air Force as the conversion training of the 50 member "Crack" team in Russia is over. More Sukhoi-30 will arrive in near future. Late last year, India has signed a Rs. 6,300 crore contract with Russia, its Sukhois. Similarly, the 8-tonne state-of-the-art multi role combat aircraft LCA is a feather in the cap of our defence capability. The aircraft has been designed to have considerably ability, rapid, acceleration, good runway performance and a high weapons load. It is likely to be inducted into IAF by the year 2002. The state-of-the art Arjun Tank has been cleared for mass production. These are really very encouraging developments and yet the journey is long and arduous.

No doubt weapons, machines and military hardware are the great importance in any given defence system, but in the ultimate analysis it is the officer and jawans of our forces which matter the most.

They should be kept in very good mental and physical health. Their satisfaction, training and welfare should be given top most priority. The Fifth Pay Commission Report is said to have failed to take care of the interests of our armed forces and therefore, there is widespread resentment against it among the people in the uniform. Actually there should have been a separate pay commission to deal with the pay problems of the armed forces. The service conditions of armed personnel are totally different from that of civilians. It is feared that recent Pay Commission recommendation in regard to armed forces would further make careers in armed forces less attractive, and young entrants would prefer civilian career when the country needs more efficient, intelligent, smart, dedicated and qualified officers and jawans. We cannot afford to turn our armed forces into the second best.

It is the need of the hour that all the gaps in our defence system are sealed, all or missiles are rapidly developed and deployed and there is no yielding to MTCR pressure. We should keep our nuclear options open and should not hesitate in taking hard decisions to meet satisfactorily the security

challenges. We should develop our defence systems indigenously. We possess enough resources and intelligence to do it on our own. At the same time the morale of the armed forces should be kept high by paying them commensurate with their hard work, dedication, sacrifices, very difficult service conditions and risks involved and their retirement at early age. They should have adequate promotional and career opportunities. Their emoluments should be determined on their own merits and should not be mixed up with those of civilians.