

India Goes Nuclear

Synopsis: India's successful nuclear tests on May 11 and 13, 1998 at Pokhran have catapulted her to one of the nuclear power states of the world. The tests were of the measured yields and there was no release of radio activity. The tests were prepared in perfect secrecy; India had conducted its first nuclear test at the same site in 1974. India's nuclear programme began in 1948 and since then it has covered a very long and significant ground. India's security concern and nuclear environment compelled it to make these tests after a lapse of about a quarter century. Pakistan has been exporting terrorism in India and developing missiles and nukes with China's help mainly targeted to be used against India. Besides Pakistan, China is also reported to have such collaboration with Myanmar. These attempts to encircle India strategically are of great concern and needed to be addressed. China and Pakistan are still in possession of large chunks of Indian land. India as a nuclear power does not intend to threaten any country and it is a peace-loving country committed to global disarmament. But as a Sovereign State India has every right to defend itself.

Two more tests were conducted on 13 May, 1998 which were also sophisticated low-yield sub-kiloton tests. In the words of an expert these "micro and mini-nukes were the most sophisticated and the latest series of nuclear tests in the world." This significant Operation, code named 'Shakti' was carried out under the overall supervision of DRDO Chief Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Dr. R. Chidambaram. They were there at Pokhran and on the spot on that historic day.

In our own country, this process of indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources all these years have created ecological insecurity and rapid degradation of animal and plant life so much so that the very survival of the nation is at stake. The explosive population and industrial growth have unfolded an age of untold suffering, diseases and disasters. The levels of pollution in air, water, soil etc, have reached record levels and well beyond biological endurance. According to a report of Tata Energy Research Institute the subcontinental environment is losing its green cover at such a fast rate that ecological disaster is imminent, if it is not checked immediately. It does not augur well for sustainable development and economical growth.

Poaching coupled with indiscriminate commercial and industrial expansion threatens the Indian wildlife. A member of the Indian Board of Wildlife and the Steering Committee of Project Tiger has identified 50 wildlife hot spots in

the 50th year of Indian independence. These sanctuaries and national parks are the best water catchment Areas. The water security of the subcontinent will be at risk if these areas are degraded or lost, he warns, what is worse, India's network of parks and sanctuaries is being dismembered by government design and sanction, almost invariably for short term gains. India's wildlife species might become extinct because of the rapacity of developers and the avarice of the poachers, avers he.

In modern India there have been many great champions of science and advocates of scientific thinking who paid their wholehearted homage at the shrine of pure knowledge. But Pt. Nehru stands above them all because he strove hard throughout his life as a man, leader and the first Prime Minister of India to inculcate the scientific temper among the Indian populace. Once in an opening ceremony speaking on the spirit of Science, he said, "Science teaches us new ways of doing things. Perhaps, it improves our conditions of industrial life but the basic things that science should do is to teach us to think straight, to act straight and not to be afraid of discarding anything or of accepting anything provided there are sufficient reasons for doing so.

Effective weaponisation means colossal investment and expenditure. A credible deterrent would mean manufacturing of at least 50 Agni missiles with a range of 3500 km, each with a capability to carry 10-tonne nuclear payload. It is estimated that each of such missiles would cost at least ₹5 crores. No doubt enormous funds would be needed to take India's nuclear programme beyond Pokhran. But no sacrifice is too great for the country's safety and security. It amply proves that India can competently undertake cost-effective weaponisation and yet need not eat grass.