

Was India's Nuclear Testing Necessary?

India conducted three nuclear tests on May 11th, 1998 and two more on May 13th after a gap of 24 years. It is superior technologically in comparison to 1974 tests. It comprised of both Fission and Fusion tests. It also showed the capability to produce Hydrogen Bomb. Its operation took place under such a secrecy that even American satellites could not detect it. It took the World to surprise especially America.

But was the nuclear testing really necessary? Vajpayee government gave the reason that security environment in the region had deteriorated over the years. The security threats from Pakistan and China were increasing. Pakistan attacked India twice and was involved in Proxy wars over Jammu and Kashmir. China had been helping Pakistan in acquiring missile and nuclear technology. China having gone nuclear had installed its missiles facing Indian cities. The recent production of Ghauri missile from Pakistan has been possible due to Chinese help. So a nexus had been established between China and Pakistan to trouble India. In India's security threat perception China had always been a potential threat due to its unreliable nature. It attacked India in 1962. Our border problem is still unresolved. Large piece of Indian land is still with China. It shows Arunachal Pradesh in its political map. Looking at the threats it was not necessary at this time to go for nuclear testing. There is nothing new in the threats. It has been existing over the years. The relations with China were improving. The terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir was declining. Pakistan and India had not fought for the last 27 years. The efforts were on towards confidence building measures. Many rounds of talks had taken place between two countries. The timing of testing is unjustified. The entire efforts towards normalization of relations has taken a backstay. In response to India's nuclear testing Pakistan also conducted six tests which was to come to equal terms with India.

The impact of nuclear testing can be devastating for both the countries. Both are poor nations in South Asia and rank at the bottom of Human Development Index. It can lead to arms race in South Asia. As a result defence budget will be enhanced instead that money could have been utilized for social development. Due to nuclear testing USA imposed sanctions on both India and Pakistan and faced condemnation from the World Community. Japan, Germany, Australia, Sweden also imposed sanctions by which all bilateral aid will be stopped. According to one estimate India is going to suffer a loss of approximate 21 billion dollar. Pakistan will also be hit worse because its economy is mainly dependent on the foreign aid. But India differs on the impact of sanctions. India, says that USA will also be affected because of its market interests. But why to impose an

unnecessary burden at this time. It could have been avoided. The compulsion of Pakistan is that it has to counter India. Its policies are reactionary. Another impact is that Chinese-Pakistan nexus which has become more clear now can be dangerous for India's security.

Though most of Indians took pride in this national event at the achievements of our scientists and engineers but in coming years they are going to face hardships and challenges. It will be better if national pride gets converted into better work culture. Otherwise we are going to be at a greater loss. In the post testing phase Indian leaders should practice restraints in their statements. They should ensure that the tensions with neighbours might not escalate and all efforts should be driven towards normalization and peace which has been the essence of Indian foreign policy.

It is too early to gauge the impact of sanctions in economic terms. But initial Indian estimates show that it might not be more than 2 billion dollars. Developmental and Humanitarian aid will not be cut. The World Community is not unanimous as far as sanctions are concerned. Russia is not supporting sanctions. Instead Russia is cooperating in setting up of nuclear power reactors in India. Group of non-aligned countries have also shown solidarity with India on nuclear testing. But nuclear testing has created fresh problems. Efforts are being made to internationalise the Kashmir issue and search for mediator is on. The West led by United States is trying to pressurize both India and Pakistan to sign Nuclear non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

The tests could have been avoided because our priority is social development where more than 40% of the population live below the poverty line. Testing is not going to serve any purpose. Our aim is total elimination of nuclear weapons and testing by India can't pressurize the West. We can be pressurized only by strong economic and technological development. We should learn lessons from German and Japan to give priority on economic development. Otherwise India can become another Afghanistan where people have arms and no food to eat.