



## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### A Thought for Today

All flatterers live at the expense of those who listen to

them.

— JEAN DE LA FONTAINE.

## A Battle of Wits

While dissidence is second nature to Congressmen, rebellion against the so-called 'high command' is something they are capable of only when out of power. It is obvious that Mr K. Karunakaran had momentarily forgotten this cardinal principle. His premature coup attempt against Prime Minister Narasimha Rao is a non-starter, at least for now. While his 'one man-one post' call hasn't exactly inflamed passions in the party, Rao loyalists have managed to round up a convincing number of Pradesh Congress Committee chiefs and Congress chief ministers. Hope springs eternal in the Congressman's heart. Indeed, the fact that the PCC chiefs and Congress chief ministers have fallen in line suggests that the survival instincts of Congressmen have got the better of any genuine anger and dismay there may be in the party over Mr Rao's handling of the election campaign, especially the management of party affairs in Tamil Nadu. Mr Karunakaran himself has been quick to strike but afraid to wound. Not many, however, will buy his clarification that his remarks were meant to strengthen the party and not denounce Mr Rao. The 'one man-one post' demand had been raised by dissidents alienated from the party 'high command' even in the days of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Mr Karunakaran is probably correct in charging Mr Rao with neglecting the party organisation and making mistakes in the run-up to the 1996 elections. And yet, if the move is being viewed with suspicion within the party, it is because he has revived the issue now, on the eve of government formation and after five long years of silence.

Had Mr Karunakaran pressed the issue even a couple of months ago he may have found more support. He had a fighting chance even a fortnight back, when all the opinion polls had given up on the Congress. But now hopes of returning to office as the single largest party have revived within the Congress party and few desert a winner. The matter will automatically gain fresh momentum should the Congress fall into second place. Then Mr Rao may himself feel compelled to step down. It is quite possible that Mr Karunakaran is wooing ex-Congressmen and other elements within the Opposition with the express aim of positioning himself as the natural alternative to Mr Rao in the event of a Congress defeat. But the moment is not yet ripe for that. Which is why Mr Karunakaran has not entirely burnt his bridges with the Rao Congress. Then there is the Sonia factor. It is odd that rather than sort out the leadership problem among themselves, some partymen should still be running to her for comfort whenever in distress. The party must learn to grow up. As for ex-Congressmen like Mr Arjun Singh, Mr Madhav Rao Scindia, Mr Chidambaram and the like, it is only to be expected that they will support any revolt against Mr Rao. Once the battle of the ballot is over, it will be a battle of wits and it remains to be seen who will outwit whom and who has the last laugh.

## A Wake-up Call

United States defence secretary William Perry's assertion that the U.S. will retaliate against a chemical attack with nuclear weapons, if necessary, should alert this country to the logic of nuclear deterrence. Mr Perry's stand follows from the international community's legitimisation of nuclear weapons through the unconditional and indefinite extension of the Non-proliferation Treaty. The proposed delegitimisation of chemical weapons through a convention to ban and eliminate chemical weapons, however, is yet to be ratified by major powers. This stand also underlies the U.S. policy not to offer a 'no first use' pledge in respect of nuclear weapons. This declaratory strategy has two implications for countries like India which are not under the pro-

# CTBT & Weapons Option

## Nuclear Policy in a Mess

By PRAFUL BIDWAI

CONTRARY to the assertion that there exists a strong consensus on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) issue, and more generally, on nuclear policy, there is evidence of cleavages and differences, both of substance and nuance. Actual conduct, as well as most official statements on India's nuclear position, suggests that New Delhi regards the nuclear weapons option as vital to security.

The foreign secretary's March 21 statement at the Conference on Disarmament is, however, at odds with this. Mr Salman Haidar said: "We do not believe that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is essential for national security... We, therefore, seek their complete elimination. These are fundamental precepts" for India's "foreign and national security policy". Mr Pranab Mukherjee in December strongly denied that India has or had plans to conduct a nuclear explosion. But on March 8 he had told a select audience in New Delhi that "we were planning" to conduct a test late last year, but "something happened"; we may do that "later".

The incoherence extends to the CTBT issue too. Many have argued that the CTBT being negotiated is an iniquitous or ineffective treaty, and against India's interest. Few, however, are prepared to take this to its logical conclusion, viz., that India should scupper the negotiations by exercising its veto power, which like all CD members it possesses. They at best cite *non sequitur* or "tactical" reasons for not doing so.

### Mistaken Arguments

Most of the current arguments against the CTBT are mistaken. Broadly, these fall into three categories. First, the CTBT today, unlike in 1954 or even in 1993 — when India co-sponsored a motion with the U.S. urging a CTBT, without mentioning nuclear disarmament — will be unequal and discriminatory, and aimed at horizontal, rather than vertical, proliferation. Second, the nuclear weapons-states (NWSs), in particular the Western ones, are so technologically advanced that they don't need to test. And third, detection of clandestine tests by the NWSs will be virtually impossible under the verification system proposed.

These arguments are specious. A CTBT was always conceived as a capping measure. It still remains valid and valuable as one, even though it won't produce disarmament. It will be more effective against vertical than horizontal proliferation. Without tests involving a yield of nuclear energy, no qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons is possible. A basic fission bomb capability can, however, be acquired without testing.

A CTBT will lead to slowing and cessation of the nuclear arms race. In its absence the NWSs, especially the U.S., could develop new weapon systems, including "third-generation" nuclear-triggered laser and directed energy weapons, microwave weapons, mini-or micro-nukes, and "fourth-generation" weapons such as solid hydrogen and anti-protons. It cannot be in India's interest to allow this vertical proliferation.

### Explosive Testing

Second, laboratory tests can never replace explosive testing. Computers cannot tell designers what they don't already know. Unless data generated from hydronuclear tests or full-fledged explosions is fed into them, they cannot produce inputs for weapons design. Nuclear explosions are non-linear, coupled and extremely turbulent systems using materials under ultra-high densities and pressures. Computer codes are therefore only approximations to reality. Parameters fed into them have to be adjusted for each type of calculation. There are no universal parameters. Weapon codes need continual updating with data from real tests. "Ironically, the more the tests, the more questionable the codes become... until they have been recalibrated against nuclear tests".

The NWSs, then, cannot develop or refine weapons with computer codes alone. Nor are hydrodynamic tests (which involve studying implosion assemblies without fissile material) a substitute. At the very least, HNEs are necessary for that. But the most widely accepted definition of a CTBT's scope bans HNEs.

Third, small deep-underground explosions are liable to be detected. The verification agenda being negotiated in Geneva involves an international monitoring system on which there is broad agreement. This will use four technologies: seismic, hydroacoustic, infra-sound and radionuclide. Detectors will be set up at test sites. Radionuclide sensors are extremely sensitive. It will be extremely difficult to cheat on the CTBT or evade detection. At any rate, this is an argument for tighter, more intrusive verification, which India has been opposing in Geneva.

Will the CTBT lead to an elimination of India's weapons option? Whatever the U.S.'s stated objectives, and however questionable, the CTBT is not an effective means of achieving them. It will not commit India to degrading, leave alone rolling back, its capability, any more than it would compel the U.S. to do so. If anything, it will strengthen the momentum towards genuine nuclear disarmament, especially if followed up by a fissile materials ban (fissban), and no-first-use treaty. Fissban is already on the CD's

agenda.

What can India do if it does not sign a CTBT which is completed this year? Barring sabotaging it, there are only three options: waiting; second, testing, but not going openly nuclear; and third, declaring India to be an NWS and building a large first- and second-generation arsenal. Waiting while the rest of the world, including perhaps Pakistan, has signed, will isolate India, bring the U.S. and Pakistan closer, and lead to an adverse shift in the conventional security balance in South Asia. It will yield no benefit to offset the cost, which will rise as fissban talks proceed. This is a passive non-policy.

### Symbolic Importance

Take testing. Carrying out just one test is of symbolic importance. It won't help develop boosted fission weapons or miniaturise existing designs. Multiple tests will only bring odium, and guarantees a loss in India's global stature. They only make sense if New Delhi embarks on full overt nuclearisation. The second option thus logically leads to the third. The third option will make India a nuclear leper state which opposes the only progress towards nuclear disarmament the world has seen in a long a time. The only conceivable rationalisation for overt nuclearisation is that India must get equal with China. This makes little sense: India has learnt to live with a nuclear China since 1964, and Chinese missiles are known not to target India. An effective deterrent against China will mean the investment of tens of thousands of crores in fissile materials, bombs, missiles and a control and command infrastructure — an unconscionable cost.

More important, by joining the 'China League,' India will have engendered nuclear rivalry not just with China, but with the U.S. and Russia. That makes nonsense of "minimal deterrence" and any half-way rational notion of security. It is a prescription for disaster.

This is not to argue that India should play a passive role at Geneva and blindly sign any treaty that comes along. On the contrary, it should try to secure a bona fide zero-yield treaty with tough verification, and a preambular commitment to complete nuclear disarmament. Such a treaty is within reach, but could slip away if the momentum is lost. A new text prepared by the test ban committee chairman, Mr Jaap Ramaker, provides a good basis to speed up the talks to early conclusion, in keeping with a U.N. resolution. Our policy-makers must not be swayed by blind ultra-nationalism. Such nationalism comes very cheap. Did we not recently see it in full play at Eden Gardens?