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Crux of defence cost

Sir,

Soman Pennempalath's article "Must we spend so much on arms" (IE, June 11) is welcome as defence is a subject that is rarely debated in our country.

It cannot be disputed that there are always chances of a nation overspending on its defence. It is very difficult for any defence expert to evaluate the exact magnitude of the threat facing a country.

The size of the defence budget and the percentage that it forms of the total budget may be indicative of the burden of defence that a nation is carrying but not of its adequacy. Even then the staggering figure of Rs 5100 Crore must not cause us undue concern considering inflation, which is mainly responsible for determining this figure. The defence budget as a percentage of the GNP has moved up by just 0.5 per cent over a period of 15 years or more and this percentage still remains lower than those of our potential enemies. The defence burden would look insignificant when compared to the amount wasted through nepotism, corruption and inefficiency.

The exact matching of our military strength is no doubt the responsibility of the defence experts. However, as a layman one expects the strength to be such as will deter our potential enemies from taking recourse to the use of force against us. Where then is the question of over spending on defence? Even granting that expenditure on defence does not add up to human welfare, spend on defence we must; for it amounts to expenditure on our survival.

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