

**Indian Express (Chandigarh) July 4, 1985**

**India and the NPT**

Sir,

This has reference to GS Bhargava's "India and the NPT" (IE June 21-22). In his eagerness to make a case against the bomb he seems to have lost sight of the nuclear threat from China. The country's convenience rather than the actual threat seems to have dictated its defence policy all along in the in the past. One only hopes that China has not been left out here also because it is most inconvenient to think of a nuclear threat from this quarter.

It would also not be correct to say that the bomb lobby in India thrives on the philosophy of "more the merrier". Those who advocate the making of nuclear weapons are not totally without a case. Whatever ones views on whether to make the bomb or not, they must be based on reality rather than on idealism. The reality is that no country can consider itself safe from a nuclear attack until it has developed a second strike capability. It is the ability of the Super Powers to destroy each other that keeps one from getting to the throat of the other in spite of the severest provocation. Needless to say no nation can allow its nuclear defence policy to be based on the "nuclear umbrella" provided by another (the only alternative to possessing nuclear strength) as no nation would risk a nuclear war for the sake of another. Any such offers that are made are obviously for the political exploitation of the non-nuclear country by the one with a nuclear capability.

Reality also demands that the present political situation must not lull us into inactivity in the field of nuclear weapons. It does not take time for political situations to change but certainly takes time to develop a nuclear retaliatory capability.

Concepts like the nuclear free zone and the zone of peace etc are at best political gimmicks or wishful thinking, with little or no value in military terms and could hardly form the basis of a defence policy. As admitted by Mr Bhargava the creation of a nuclear free zone in south Asia does not depend on India alone and that if Pakistan sticks to its approach of seeking security in nuclear weapons, India will not be able to abjure the nuclear option for long. The question arises as to how long are we to wait for Pakistan to see reason and what we should be doing in the nuclear field while we are trying to persuade Pakistan into accepting the nuclear free zone concept. Are we to allow Pakistan to take a lead over us in this regard? Even if a nuclear free zone is created, its efficacy would not be beyond doubt. It might prevent nuclear weapon from being manufactured or being stocked in the region, but would it prevent a nuclear country outside the free zone from firing its weapons into it.

The possession of a nuclear retaliatory capability by a country, besides acting as a deterrent to a nuclear attack, is necessary even if diplomacy is to be employed for settling international disputes – for diplomacy to be effective it must be backed by military strength. We paid a heavy price in 1962 for not backing our diplomacy with matching military strength. Let us not create history by repeating the mistake twice.

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