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India-China War

Sir,

Mr K Subrahmanyam deserves kudos for highlighting Krishna Menon's failures and shortcomings along with his achievements in 'The Real Krishna Menon' (May 21). We are essentially a nation of hero worshipers and it needs moral courage to speak out against the hero while he is being worshiped, even when this is necessary for learning lessons for the future.

One may not, however, agree with Mr Subrahmanyam that the use of the Indian Air Force for tactical air support in 1962 might have turned the tide in our favour and that Krishna Menon could be faulted on this count. Apart from the fact that the Chinese retaliation, though unlikely, could not have been totally ruled out, the effectiveness of such support from the not too many combat aircraft in possession of the Indian Air Force then is also doubtful. Apparently the point is debatable and the benefit of doubt could, perhaps, go to Krishna Menon or whoever decided against the use of combat aircraft.

In fact, Krishna Menon's most "flawed brilliance" lay in his unfounded belief that "socialist countries did not launch aggressions". It was this conviction – that the Chinese would not retaliate no matter what the Indians did – that prompted India to push its troops right up to the Mac Mahon Line, more for its physical occupation than for defending it. The possibility of a war breaking out as a result of the Chinese moves and our counter moves was just not considered. It may surprise your readers to know that the 100 odd men that were sent across the Nam ka Chu river on orders from Delhi, and who bore the initial brunt of the Chinese attack, were armed with only personal weapons and had with them ammunition just enough to give battle for about half an hour or so. And all this when the Chinese had thrown broad enough hints that they would not allow any movement of Indian troops beyond the river.

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