

**Daily Excelsior April 10, 2000**

**Suggestion sans substance**

Sir,

During his recent visit to India, the US President Bill Clinton is reported to have stressed the need for America and India becoming better friends and stronger partners, after 50 years of missed opportunities. This would indeed appear to be a bold indictment of the US policy towards India all these years. For, was it not the blatant and, at times, unashamedly pro-Pakistan stance of the Western Block led by the US, on the Kashmir issue, (whatever the compulsions), that kept the two largest democracies of the World so much apart?

However, his panacea for bringing about peace in the region through restraint, respect, and dialogue, seems to be impractical, bordering on being utopian. Who would know better than the US President that, in practical terms, security is necessary for development, and it takes precedence over every other activity of the nation, no matter what the cost, and also that for diplomacy to be effective, even if it be as an effort towards peace, it must be backed by military strength. What restraint in the field of nuclear weapons may be expected from India, with strategic nuclear weapons of its enemies menacingly poised against it. If Mr Clinton were to look at the issue dispassionately he would discover that India needs to develop its nuclear weapons for exactly the same reasons as the US does. And yet while the US still retains a nuclear arsenal large enough to destroy the World many times over, India is striving to build just a second strike capability as a deterrent to first strike by the enemy.

As regards dialogue for reducing tensions, what dialogue can be carried out with a country that has repeatedly refused to honour agreements resulting from such dialogues in the past. Theoretically respect for each other's borders could probably usher peace, but what happens when your neighbour does not believe in this dictum. Would you not be justified in that case to instill that respect for your borders by force.

The US President is also reported to have said that India has forfeited, (or words to this effect), of its chances of becoming a member of the Security Council since it refused to implement the UN resolutions on plebiscite in Kashmir. It is most astonishing that the American President is so misinformed as to be unaware of the fact that it was, indeed, Pakistan that threw the spanner in the wheel to obstruct the UN sponsored plebiscite. This is probably the hang over of the wrong US policy on Kashmir followed all these years.

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