

Indian Express March 12, 1984

The cost of defence

Sir,

The point made by Mr. G.C. Katoch with regard to cost effectiveness in his article "Spending on Defence" (I E March 1) is very pertinent and one that cannot be over-emphasised. Cost effectiveness should, in fact, form the basis of not only expenditure on Defence but of all expenditure in the public sector. Yet if all the wasteful expenditure in the country is added up, the entire Defence budget would probably pale into insignificance. However, wasteful expenditure elsewhere does not justify similar waste in Defence.

Cost effectiveness in Defence has to be worked out by expert study teams and it may not be correct to arbitrarily brand certain departments as "barren holy cows" as Mr Katoch seems to have done. R&D, particularly, needs to be viewed with an understanding much beyond that of a layman. Research is a long, laborious and expensive process, the yield from which may not be in proportion to the effort that goes into it; yet it must continue if self-reliance in Defence is ever to be achieved.

The problem in the assessment of our Defence expenditure is in getting our threat perceptions correct. Although the nature of the threat is understood, the colossal effort that is required to meet it makes us to adopt an "ostrich-like posture". While many people would discuss the threat from Pakistan rather enthusiastically, few would continue the topic when the threat from China is mentioned. Mr Katoch is no exception. He warns us against the future nuclear threat from Pakistan but makes no mention of the existing threat from China.

The threat to a country's security arises out of a clash of interests. It can, therefore, be wished away only at the cost of such interest. Diplomacy is no substitute to armed strength required to deter others from taking recourse to war for settling their disputes with us. In fact, effective diplomacy must be backed by military strength. We know what happened to our diplomacy in 1962 when we had no military strength with which to back it. Both China and Pakistan laid claim to our territory. We may not be able to gain their friendship by aiming our guns at them but nor can we barter our territory for the sake of amity and the consequent lower Defence budget.

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