## Historic May Day: Some questions | Nuclear WMDs in South Asia

HE historic May Day is being observed today throughout the country and elsewhere in the world as a mark of respect to the workers, who shed their blood for the establishment of the rights of the working class in 1886. On this day 116 years ago, the workers at the Hay Market of Chicago City, USA, sacrificed their lives for ensuring eight-hour work-

Three years later, the Second Socialist International in Paris decided to designate May 1 as the day for expressing solidarity of working people in memory of Hay Market martyrs. A number of countries around the world observe the day as a national holiday with rallies and meetings.

The new major steps in the labour front was the establishment of International Labour Organisation (ILO) (three decades after the decision to observe May Day internationally). The ILO was established in 1919 to promote social justice for working class everywhere. It formulates international policies and programmes to help improve working and living conditions create international labour standards to serve as guidelines for those policies into action.

The problems of labour and consciousness about labour rights did not come overnight. In fact, the history is as old as civilisation. The between the rich and the poor representing the exploiter and the

The exploited humanity gradually turned into slaves. They were

put to hard labour and labour was ooked down upon. At one stage although slavery was formally abolished, vestiges still remain. The dignity of labour is yet to be

Labour movement has a proud heritage in this part of the world, now Bangladesh. The country is a signatory to the ILO Convention and has a number of lagislations for labour welfare. The government is also keen on improving the lot of the working class and the concern and also the present one is fiddling with the fate of the hapless lot by creating or allowing to create more than one Union? What is the achievement of the government in creating confidence and restoring industrial peace and harmony? The answers to all these questions will understandably be in the negative. Yet the questions need to

It is now nearly two years that the present democratic govern-ment is at the helm of affairs of the

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extends even to spheres where the labour is not organised.

Self-styled labour leaders particularly after the emergence of Bangladesh have sprung up only for lip service to the labour force. On this great day, some searching questions haunt the minds of those who really feel for the just cause of the working class. Why extraneous elements have found place as representatives of the labour class? Why and how they seized opportunity to create a place of their own outstripping the actual leaders from their own workplace? Why the Bargaining Agents failed to occupy their rightful position and are not representing the real workers? Why

state, but there is no industrial

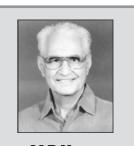
With the closing down of the biggest Adamjee Jute Mills, so many workers have been made jobless. This decision of present government has been unwise and criticised by the conscious people of the country. Labour management relations are at their lowest ebb. Let the workers' representatives emerge from the same workplace. The harmful concept of borrowed leadership concept must be changed for the restoration or creation of congenial atmosphere conducive to uninterrupted operation of all industrial establishments.

The labour unions in question in most of the cases become unreasonable and come up with fantastic demands only to help in the closure of the units.

It must be understood that better employer-employee relations can only ensure productivity and welfare of the workers. They cannot always think in terms of agitation, strikes and *gherao-jalao* tactics ingrained into their minds by a section of labour representatives who are acting at the behest of vested quarters only to cause industrial breakdown in our coun-

The wages invariably have to be linked with productivity and the demand for higher wages cannot reasonably be pressed without increasing output. There, of course, should be a guaranteed minimum wage. The working atmosphere has to be made conducive, peaceful and of course safe for women workers.

The efforts to remove economic and social causes swelling the number of child labour have to be intensified. The celebration of May Day should inspire all those connected with labour movements, to act in a manner that does not opardise production at any level. Without hard work and dedication. establishment of social justice will never be attained. Thé so-called champions of labour welfare must also realise the gravity of the situation and help in resurrecting the fragile economy of Bangladesh at a time when the foreign aid and investment climate is not so favourable, and thus ensure lasting welfare of workers through work.



M B NAQVI

■ HERE is something curious about the likely purposes of the recent visit of India's hardline Defence Minister George Fernandes to Beijing. Indian Premier Atal Behari Vajpayee had only recently made the overture for talks with Pakistan. There must then be some link with Pakistan too. In Beijing Fernandes firmly reiterated India's nuclear doctrine of 'No First Strike' Perhaps it was appropriate that the Defence Minister was sent, who after the Pokhran nuclear tests in May 1998, had nominated China as the main security threat to India. But Pakistan and the nukes must have figured in talks with Chinese leaders. NWMDs anyway have to be discussed between India and

So long as Indian and Pakistani governments say what they say that Indian WMDs are there to serve its core interests and concerns while Pakistan's basic security is predicated on its WMDs -- a modus operandi between them is, in this writer's view, impossible. Not many people fully realise the mischief these nuclear WMDs do. While India has those nucleartipped missiles aimed at Pakistan, no Pakistani general or civilian government can trust that those weapons would not be used against Pakistani targets in a grave crisis. Similarly while the nucleartipped Ghauris, Abdalis and others stand aimed at India, no responsible Indian can trust Pakistan's intentions. It is in the nature of these weapons; no adversary can be trusted with them in a crisis anywhere. Mutual trust and nukes

There is unending rhetoric from Bomb-lovers about deterrence and a possible détente or a Nuclear Restraint Regime, based on Confidence Building Measures. India and Pakistan are overt nuclear powers for five long years. Has deterrence worked? Did the two go beyond signing a Memorandum of Understanding regarding a desired

tente or NRR? Could that understanding be ever negotiated? Why was it not discussed despite good drafts provided by the Americans to both sides? Indians loftily dis-

miss the reason for this failure to Gen. Musharraf's Kargil adventure. Have they asked the simple question: how could Pakistani military, in the context of India's proven nuclear deterrent, go ahead with cocking a snook at it?

It is a serious question requiring serious inquiry. This involves the basic mischief that nuclear weapons do. The first thing that happens after a country crosses the nuclear threshold is a swollen head of its policy planners. An arrogance of power penetrates into their thinkworked. Ideally, Pakistan should be deterred by Indian nuclear might and India should be duly respectful of Pakistan's capabilities. Are the two adequately deterred? Bold will be the man who will answer in the affirmative. Which general or government can miss the fact that a Ghauri will take two to three minutes to reach its target in India? Indian Prithvi too will take the same time to wreak terrible destruction in Pakistan. No government or an army can take a rational or calculated decision or

## PLAIN WORDS

The only sane and rational thing is for common South Asians to mount an effective peace movement and let both New Delhi and Islamabad be compelled by their respective people to do without nuclear weapons altogether. A wholly non-nuclear South Asia will be so many shades saner and safer. It won't solve all the problems, of course. But the nightmare of a senseless nuclear war will disappear.

ing processes. Remember the arrogant and bellicose statements of Messrs L.K. Advani and Vajpayee made soon after May 13 Pokhran tests; they are all on record. By unexpectedly exploding six nuclear devices a bare 25 days later, Pakistan government confused the Indians. True, the Indians twice tried to start talks in accordance with the false expectations raised by their nuclear gurus who had en selling the nukes in both countries as a means of maintaining peace through deterrence. The other side wasn't buying. While the arrogance of power in

the case of Indians, thanks to their democratic framework, has remained confined to dreams of eventual grandeur based on overwhelming power being acquired and a certain moderate behaviour is mandated by plurality of decision makers, Pakistan's military rulers went overboard. Conscious of their nuclear capabilities, they converted Kashmiris' spontaneous and nonviolent mass movement in 1989 into an armed insurgency and called it Jihad. In Afghanistan they virtually went berserk and played king-makers in the 1990. They began to dream of strategic depth against India, of course. They punched well above their height. Results can be seen today: the US is wary; India is extremely inimical; Afghans of even Karzai's kind dislike Pakistanis. It is totally out of tune with most major powers.

The fact of the matter is that the doctrine of deterrence has not even to pick up the telephone within three minutes, if they do get an inkling. Today, the brutal fact is that both countries are on hairtrigger alert; both will launch on the first indication that the other is activating its missiles. A sadder fact is that they have to remain on this dangerous, instant alert --- all the time and always -- with its expected accidents and failures.

Deterrence depends upon credibility of the nuclear weapons and delivery systems plus the second strike capability. The enemy will be deterred only if the adversary, despite being nuked first will make a nuclear riposte. It also involves wholly rational decision-making: only resorting to NWMDs when being absolutely sure that the enemy has broken his spoken or unspoken commitment about not mounting a wanton attack. This particular requirement of peace-through-deterrence theory is a tall order. Look at hundreds of accidents and alarms about enemy being attacked during east-west cold war. They had 27 to 30 minutes to verify and be restrained. In volatile South Asia the available time can only be three minutes. Imagine the accidents, glitches, technical malfunctions and the power of rumours and or passions between Pakistan and Americans and their chelas in

Delhi and Islamabad have talked glibly of a rough balance of terror between the two and then the two will live in peace ever thereafter. They forget the element of trust is the first to go in nuclearisation. CBMs are no substitute for mutual trust. During the last 10 or 12 years. with CBMs in place, these facilities were forgotten and were not used whenever a crisis arose threatening a war. The two, apart from being so close to each other, cheek by jowl in fact, have purposes that can be achieved only at some cost to the other. So no experience of US-Soviet détente-making is actually relevant. Deterrence is anyhow a bogus concept and insufficient basis for peacekeeping between India and Pakistan, given the proneness to accidents and a culture of carelessness.

Moreover, semantics apart, who believes in the doctrine of 'No First Strike'? Imagine the scenario: a war is starting or has started between these two neighbours. Now which commander in India will masochistically wait, while keeping his nukes primed, until Pakistani generals have pressed the red button first -- thus suffering absolutely unacceptable destruction of, say India's one or two urbanindustrial centres -- as the theory is adumbrated. The world is told to believe that after Indian high command has made sure that this has actually happened, they will then order their own riposte that will be so massive as may send Pakistan to the stone age. Is this military behaviour amidst the dust and din of war credible? This is all too fanciful and unreal. Just as India's No First Use is not

credible, Pakistan's doctrine of eserving the right to use the nuke first -- in a critical situation where basic security of state is threatened, of course -- is also suspect. Its first use is predicated on a critical situation during a conventional war. If so, this use is even less credible because (a) the situation being already critical, such use will not ensure any relief or cessation of hostilities, much less victory; (b) it is sure to invite retaliation in kind which may lead to a worse defeat. Moreover, by the time the critical stage is reached, the capacity to use the option may have been compromised. A power with inferior conventional strength needs to avoid war altogether or start off with a nuclear strike. For, the use of nuclear weapons can only result in excessive destruction in both and old notions of victory and defeat do

What the opposing generals are more likely to do is to try and preempt the other. Thus there may be a race between the two sides to be the first to strike -- and as massively as may be feasible or judged adequate. The two, as of now, remain engaged in hectic arms races of various kinds. Why else are they conducting so many missile tests? Whatever relevance Mr. Fernandes' No First Use doctrine may work with regard to China, US or others, it has little to Pakistan.

There is no way the nuclear weapons can help win a war or maintain peace. All other uses of nuclear weapons in a possible war do not make sense. They will cause senseless destruction of vast areas. Not that preemptive use is sane. Thanks to dispersion of nuclear weapons in each country, both nations may end up with wholly unacceptable devastation for no rational purpose. Use of nuclear weapons on this Subcontinent is anyhow insane and can only result in Mutually Assured Defeat. Indeed, the damage to non combatants outside India and Pakistan can neither be avoided nor justi-

The only sane and rational thing is for common South Asians to mount an effective peace movement and let both New Delhi and Islamabad be compelled by their respective people to do without nuclear weapons altogether. A wholly non-nuclear South Asia will be so many shades saner and safer. It won't solve all the problems, of course. But the nightmare of a senseless nuclear war will disappear. Let peaceniks be given a chance -- or rather they should assert themselves here first and show that Pakistan does not produce only hawks, if also mostly bogus.

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## May Day: Global observance and national concern

AY Day is globally observed. It reminds us simultaneously of workers' rights and nations' obligations to fulfil those rights. I appreciate the global concern, but what I fail to understand is the global gap and the promises and their failures. The day and the tragedy, which ignited the global concern, is not observed in its own land -- USA. It is funny to see that particular day while USA observes its own labour day and not the May Day. In our country, in recent years although May Day is quite loudly pronounced, but tragedies still are silently skipped. To me the Labour Day means

something more. Every year this day reminds me of the unforgettable pictures and the news items concerning our garment workers who were roasted alive while on the job in the garment industries. These women industrial workers were invited to the industry sector and the garment industries proearning. But neither the industries, nor the state could protect them from such tragedies. These female workers were killed in fire hazards while on the job and except the immediate media coverage on the following day and some necessary actions on the part of their employers, almost nobody ever remembered them. What a great contradiction! While on every May Day we observe the occasion stressing global concern for labourers' rights and narrate vividly what happened in Chicago more than a century ago, we forget our own and recent experiences and fail to take renewed pledges as a nation. Why is this gap? Is it because these workers are women? Or, because the garment workers are a marginal group? Do we take for granted that

the garment workers are too powerless employees against the too powerful employers? One may ask me at this point -- why I bring this issue particularly? Needless to say, the whole matter pains me much. It demonstrates our pathetic neglect nation's workers.

On May Day let us not forget that the garment industries accounted for 73.28 percent share in the nation's total exports (1997-98), amounting to 3781.94 million US\$ and garment workers constituted an estimated 1.50 million in 2726 RMG factories in that particu-

It thus suggests that garment sector's importance to national economy needs neither debate nor much dialogue to prove. Research

Every May Day should remind us that we killed our garment workers merely because of nation's neglect. It is an unforgivable offence and our shame! The clear violation of Factory Laws made our garment workers easy prey to fire hazards where they were trapped inside the factories.

Garment workers' susceptibility to fire hazard is unusually high as the raw materials used in the industries are highly inflammable. All the recent incidents have shown us that severe neglect in observing safety rules have made the garment workers victims. Doctor Protima Paul-Majumder mentions from Fire Brigade sources that upto November 1997, 58 fire accidents took place in garment industries killing 118 workers of whom 90

In recent years, many improvements are claimed to have taken place. Let us hope that these are meaningful ones which will bring us not only prosperity, but ensure safety for our workers in the garment sector.

ers in garment industries vary from 85 percent to 90 per cent from factory to factory, the vast majority of whom are neo-migrants (87 percent) to the cities belonging to landless or marginal economic cells and from illiterate families. This data from various studies suggests that female garment workers are a significant group who are over-worked and ill-paid in the industrial sector. But we should not forget that approximately 90 percent of this labour force contribute significantly to the household economy. Thus female garment workers in the industrial sector are a vital distinct force and deserve special focus and attention -- at least not the nation's neglect!

says that number of women work- percent were female. Among the death casualties, about half of these workers died in stampede or while jumping from roof or verandah. In one incident, stampede killed 28 workers while there was false sound of plug burst. The research shows that due to violation of the Factory Laws, workers are trapped inside the factory rooms and all forms of stampedes, falls etc caused either death or sever injuries on top of direct roasting in fire and severe burns and permanent physical damages. Thus, our garment workers are victims not merely of professional hazards, but lack of empowerment means -- it is their life and death question too. On May Day we should remember especially those

who laid their lives at the alter of our national prosperity. RMG as we see it, is our gateway

to 'trading out of poverty'. Its emergence as a major industrial sub-sector calls for more research, more debates, more thinking and re-thinking as well as challenges. This sector is not merely labour intensive, it is female labour oriented industry. Women are chosen because of their dexterity and sincerity who can work despite the strenuousness and adverse work ing conditions. As garment sector s heavily oriented towards women labour force, the tendency to neglect labour issues is highly observed. But we forget that labour is an essential factor in our production, and the more attention we pay to our female workers, the

In recent years, many improve-ments, at least on paper, are claimed to have taken place. Let us hope that these are meaningful ones which will bring us not only prosperity, but ensure safety for our workers in the garment sector. Let these be seriously imple-

May Day should bring in real effort. Media should portray reality and give much better coverage.

Let the education system of the country play meaningful role in teaching our future generation the reality and implications of the Labour Day.

I strongly feel that a symbolic cenotaph be constructed with the names of the victims of our garment industries who were killed in the factories engraved, where people from all walks of life will have a chance to pay their own

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