

The Five Blasts and the End of a Dream

by Enam A Chaudhury

The South Asia region, which was indeed in a threshold of an era of cooperation, peace and prosperity, has been forced into a very possible arms race, to a nuclear weaponry race and a missile race.

THE three nuclear blasts conducted by India on 11th May followed by two more on May 13, have dealt a shattering blow to the dream of nuclear-free South Asia that the peace-loving people of the subcontinent had so far fondly cherished. The policies that the governments in the region professed to pursue contributed to the creation of a congenial environment, where it was hoped that the disputes and differences that the neighbours had would be settled amicably in an atmosphere of understanding and harmony. There would be no threats of confrontation.

In the afternoon of May 11, India buried the hope in the sands of Rajasthan, and the government of India unmasked itself. There were, of course, apprehensions for quite some time that the government may adopt a jingoistic posture, and the recent utterance of Mr Jha in Sri Lanka of India's willingness to show "friendly concern" in the affairs of her neighbours sent a chill of fear in many. The nuclear blasts indicate the "affectionate" longing may take the shape of the hug of a bear — at least the threats have been clearly indicated — in no uncertain terms — in unmistakable language.

Of course, there are peace-loving people in India, but what bothers one most is that there have been reports of rejoicing in the country on the scientific "achievement" and the blasts have been heralded as a proof of the country's scientific and technological "progress". Mr Raja Ramanna, one of the scientists who masterminded India's May 1974 underground test said, "Blasts signalled tremendous progress".

Mr Bal Thackeray, leader of the militant Hindu Party that rules Maharashtra, and is in partnership with ruling BJP said, "We have to prove that we are not eunuchs". The utterance is like justification of rape to prove one's virility. Prime Minister Vajpayee has sent out explanatory letters to contain the diplomatic fall-out and has stated as a justification that "these tests did not release any radio-activity in the atmosphere". I am sorry to say, but these words sound, to say the least, ridiculous.

The Indian Minister for Science and Technology, Mr Murlidhar Joshi, issued further threats and said that the Indian scientists will cap the country's missiles with nuclear warheads as soon as the situation requires.

What an unfortunate development in the scenario, when only in the golden jubilee year of 1997 the governments and the people of the subcontinent were looking forward to a future free of threats of confrontations, and arms race — a future in which all-out efforts could be undertaken and all resources mobilised to strengthen neighbourly cooperation and to fight poverty and disease, instead of a nuclear war. Five blasts and the dream turns into a nightmare.

The tests, conducted in spite of international efforts to arrange a global ban on nuclear explosions and nuclear proliferation have earned international condemnation. President Bill Clinton, being 'deeply disturbed', has warned of tough sanctions. President Yeltsin has deeply regretted and so has Japan's Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto.

We have heard voices of angry protests from Germany, Canada, UK, Australia, China, Pakistan, New Zealand, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand — in fact countries all around the globe. Strong economic sanctions and withdrawal of aid and investment are being contemplated. But are these good enough? The distrust, tension, fear and apprehension, which have been created, will thwart all efforts for economic cooperation and channelisation of maximum resources for poverty alleviation and economic development. The South Asia region, which was indeed in a threshold of an era of cooperation, peace and prosperity, has been forced into a very possible arms race, to a nuclear weaponry race and a missile race. Pakistan has vowed to make her defence impregnable

and it goes without saying that the pressure in the country to equalise will be almost irresistible. But this destructive arrogance should be punished and this madness must stop. Sanity and wisdom must prevail. The world at large will have to ensure that for the cause of peace, for the sake of human progress and development, and for a better future for the posterity.

President Clinton has called upon India's neighbours (meaning Pakistan) not to follow the path of a dangerous arms race. But why would one listen to such advice unless the consequence of such rash and dreadful actions is made plain and real. President Clinton said, "Our laws have very stringent provisions signed into law by me in 1994 and I intend to implement them fully". Canada has said that the tests would be "front and center" of the ensuing May 15/17 Group of Eight Summit of the world's most powerful nations.

The peace-loving world and its teeming millions will wait and see the outcome of the Legislations and Consultations. However loud and condemning the outcry may be, it has to be effective for the sake of a better future for the humanity in general, and the region in particular.

Bangladesh has always been in favour of a nuclear-free South Asia and the Indian Ocean. She has been striving hard for initiating meaningful regional cooperation. Bangladesh has signed NPT and CTBT. There should, therefore, be no confusion in the minds of the policy makers in Bangladesh as to what the nation believes in and there is no reason as to why this should not be pronounced with all the clarity and strength that the voice can command.

A spokesman of the government reportedly said, "We do not want to comment now. We

are waiting to get the full facts of the matter." I hope we are not waiting to get the scientific details of the technological process of exploding a nuclear bomb. Bangladesh has been maintaining good neighbourly relations with India, and at least, for the sake of sincere friendship, we should speak up our mind, loud and clear.

I recall, years ago, when the daughter of the Libyan leader Gaddafi was killed by an American bomb, Thailand, a member of the UN Security Council those days and a trusted friend of the US, did not hesitate to come out with a strongly worded disapproval of the action and the then Permanent Representative of Thailand to UN, delivered a sharp yet convincing statement while casting his country's vote.

Since we are friends, there is absolutely no reason why we should not very sincerely point out that the nuclear explosions have been most negative and regressive actions for peace in the region, that we strongly condemn and disapprove such attitude and activities that proliferate nuclear and arms race, and that we do not consider such scientific development as progress.

It has been explained in some newspapers that since the Vajpayee government was losing ground and popularity, it blasted the bombs to win the hearts of the Indian masses. If that is the case, what is the guarantee that it would not drop a bomb on a neighbour in case the government's popularity goes further down?

This is a time when the world's conscience should be aroused to an extent that perpetrators of such condemnable actions are made to feel and know that such activities would not pay; that recognition and appreciation are not obtained by bullying others. Reaction to the blasts will dictate and shape the course of the arms race and determine the possibility of peace in the region. To borrow a word from Mr Bal Thackeray, the world should not turn 'Eunuch' at this moment of history.

The author is former Secretary of the government of Bangladesh and former Vice-President of the Jeddah-based Islami Bank

Another 'Upper Volta with Rockets'?

by Brig (Retd) M Abdul Hafiz

If India has been prompted by the nuclear environment of the neighbourhood as Vajpayee writes to the heads of the great power, how should now her own neighbours react to the nuclear environment created by her?

IT is one of the convenient ploys in the sub-continent's domestic politics to open up its external front whenever there is a crisis at home. The one-and-a-half-months old BJP-led government in Delhi, already embattled with its fractious allies, seemed to have done that when its defence minister George Fernandes suddenly and almost unexpectedly attacked China calling her a threat to India's security. And made a blanket-accusation about Sino-Pakistan collusion against India. Two estranged giants across the Himalayas have been painstakingly repairing their ruptured relationship since 1962 Sino-Indian war and Indo-Pakistan foreign secretary level talks were just recently revived with great efforts. George's remarks, therefore, drew sharp reactions from the opposition at home while BJP stalwarts including Prime Minister Vajpayee remained approvingly mum. China already called Indian defence minister's remarks 'ridiculous' and Myanmar 'wrong'.

The drama enacted by George Fernandes may or may not provide a respite to Vajpayee's governance, but it has certainly been seen as an apt background for India's triumphant entry into prestigious nuclear club as its sixth member. The emerging security debate in the wake of the defence minister's controversial comments built up an ambience for India's long-awaited nuclearisation. Did Indian government deliberately build up a fresh alacrity in foreign and defence policy front with defence minister briskly visiting military installations and meeting the top brass from the services for the impending nuclear explosion after twenty four years of its first blast at Pokhran? Did India's eerie silence on Pakistan's successful testing of 'Ghauri' indicate a lull before the storm?

That India will go nuclear was just a matter of time. India has been preparing for it since her independence with India's Atomic Energy Commission — the first in Asia — coming into being in 1948 with a mandate to launch a comprehensive nuclear programme. But its timing now at this juncture when domestic concerns impose enormous constraints on India's role in the world is significant both from the points of view of India's domestic politics and her global policy.

When it attained independence in 1947, but he envisioned a different kind of great-power status for India. It was the pursuit of economic development in an atmosphere of global peace through non-alignment with either of the superpowers that once gave Indian foreign policy a high international profile. But an unfettered escalation of cold war and continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons with China exploding her device soon after India's defeat in Sino-Indian border war shattered the Nehruvian world view. It made India take a U-turn in her policy posture. Abandoning the creed of nonviolence of its founding father, now onward Nehru's successors followed a dangerous course making India the fourth largest military power of the world.

In spite of its credentials of being the world's largest democracy, a sleeping economic giant and a great military power, India was, however, conspicuously, sidelined in world affairs for a variety of reasons. It was found to be incapable of playing effective international role for its growing preoccupation with acute domestic problems and standing threat to her security, mostly internal. India's global role was also affected by many contradictions in her national identity and the country's failure to take its immediate neighbourhood in confidence. Given this decline in the country's state India desperately needed a boost to its national morale. In recent times many Indians felt that the decline could be substantially made up with country going nuclear and they would be cared like Chinese in international arena.

On the domestic front the temptations were even more irresistible. Although all earlier governments in India kept open the option of India's nuclearisation, the ruling BJP has been the first to use 'nuclear India' as one of its election planks. Because of the lack of the party's absolute hold over the parliament it is unable to implement its 'Hindutva' programme without coming into clash with its alliance partners. The nuclearisation of

India was however found the safest card to be played without antagonising any one either in the government or in the opposition.

In spite of growing disunity in Indian polity there has always been a consensus on foreign policy issues, particularly the ones relating to India's image as a great power. BJP wanted to exploit this public sentiment almost at no cost. BJP also knew that with no dissent at home the adverse international reaction would be manageable. After all, even in 1974 well after the imposition of KPT India's first nuclear explosion became a *fait accompli* after routine 'shocks' and 'surprises' by international community much of which later considered India entitled in her own right to this key to winning great-power status. According to BJP's calculation, the punitive measures, if any, will not be much effective to a vast country like India — that too a nuclear power now. In any case, the big powers are already attuned to India's ambitions given the country's long resistance against the signing to either NPT or CTBT. If the spate of criticism against India's nuclearisation can be successfully contained all credits will go to BJP for making India nuclear and the party will enjoy tremendous clout in Indian politics. It is in many ways a high point of BJP's brinkmanship in its — power play.

As expected there has been strong condemnation of India's triple explosions conducted on 11 May 98. Underground the radioactive fallout of the blast has been well contained as claimed by Vajpayee himself but its political fallout has been wide and adverse. President Clinton has threatened India with stringent sanctions and European Union with the suspension of economic aid. Japan has called for collective action against India while others including Australia and New Zealand condemned and called back their ambassadors. Russia expressed disappointment and China her concerns. However the reaction of Pakistan has obviously been the most stri-

dent. The explosions and India's nuclearisation have raised the security stakes of Pakistan which is under pressure of its people to follow the suit. In India however the mood is euphoric and that of BJP is celebratory.

But in its euphoria does India know what a dangerous course it has treaded? The blasts will inexorably revive a triangular arms race among China, India and Pakistan, now with a nuclear dimension. China will, in all likelihood, be tempted to update its nuclear arsenal with fresh tests. Pakistan is likely to give a fitting response to Indian blasts by openly carrying out her nuclear detonation. Pakistan has given enough indication of defying American pressure and would like to test its bombs before the pressures are built up. Even in the past the US has failed to pressurise Pakistan in rolling back its nuclear programme and Pakistan — an aid addicted country — withstood the suspension of aid. However, risks lie more in the military bureaucratic control of its nuclear arsenal.

During the closing days of Soviet Union when its economy was crumbling under the weight of its huge military complexes the west ridiculed her as 'upper volta with rockets'. It was when Soviet Union was still the superpower whose stage of socio-economic development, standard of living, enormous resources, scientific advancement etc. were far more superior and ahead of those in India. After all, Soviet Union with all its flaws competed with the west for three quarters of a century. But finally she really proved to be 'upper volta with rockets' only when the west defeated her in cold war on an economic plane. Euphoria and celebration notwithstanding, India is too tragically a poor country to sustain a nuclear arsenal. How a country, where thirtyfive per cent of its population live under poverty line, millions are malnourished having no access to drinking water and another millions live in the squalor of gutter, can have the luxury of going nuclear? If she has been prompted by the nuclear environment of the neighbourhood as Vajpayee writes to the heads of the great power, how should now her own neighbours react to the nuclear environment created by her?

Metropolitan

176 arrested on various charges

Police rounded up 176 people from different parts of the city on various charges during last 24 hours till 6 am yesterday, reports UNB.

Of the arrested, 21 were wanted criminals, 24 held on charges of murder, dacoity, snatching, extortion and terrorism and other 94 under DMP Ordinance.

Legal action has been taken against the arrested people.

Qulkhwani

Qulkhwan of Suraiya Tarafdar wife of Brig (ret'd) JI Tarafdar will be held today after prayers at her residence at House No 76, Bloc-D, Road No 11, Banani in the city, says a press release. Suraiya Tarafdar died on Tuesday.

***** Qulkhwan of S S Zoha, retired divisional commissioner, will be held today after Asr prayers at 4-1/D Katasur in the city, reports BSS.

Zoha, who died on Monday at the age of 86, is survived by his wife, one daughter and one son. His son, S F Reza, is principal of the Postal Academy, Rajshahi.

Chehlum

Chehlum of Abdul Mueek Khan, a noted industrialist and founder chairman of Oponin Group of Industries, will be held after Asr prayers today at the Oponin head office, 30 New Eskaton Road, says a press release.

Chehlums will also be held at the village Shekherhat at 10 am and at Jhalakathi town at 12 in the noon on Sunday while at the Muslim Gorstari Masjid in Barisal on Monday.

***** Chehlum of Dr Benazir Durdana Khan, an associate professor of English in Dhaka University and a director of The Daily Bangladrash Patrika, will be held after Asr prayers at house No. 9 Road 47 in Gulshan-2 today, says a press release. Dr Benazir Durdana Khan died on April 8.

***** Chehlum of Khondakar Wahidul Ahad, a retired high government official, will be held tomorrow at 349, Elephant Road in the city, says a press release.



Progotishil Nari Samaj brought out a procession protesting the increasing incidents of rape and deteriorating law and order situation in the city yesterday. — Star photo

During 'recent decades' 2000 Bangladeshi students graduated from Russia

By Staff Correspondent

At least 700 students from Bangladesh went to Russia for higher studies last year while some 2000 more graduated from Russian institutions during the 'recent decades'.

Students from Bangladesh have a bright prospect for higher studies in 548 state universities and 200 private colleges and universities in Russia. These were stated by a visiting delegation of representatives from seven Russian universities at a press conference at the Russian Cultural Centre in the city yesterday.

Members of the delegation underscored the need for closer ties in different sectors between Bangladesh and Russia and said this can be better initiated through educational exchanges. Pointing to different facilities and scholarships provided by the Russian government and the universities, Dr A V Mazur of Voronez Forestry Academy said that performance of Bangladeshi students in Russia is among the best.

At present there are 25 teachers in Dhaka University, 15 in BUET and 10 in Jahangirnagar University, who obtained higher education in Russia.

Led by Dr V G Mirgorod, chief expert of Roszarubezhstr, the delegation comprises Dr A V Mazur of Voronez Forestry Academy, Dr E I Rybnov of Saint Petersburg University of Architecture and Civil Engineering Dr V P Jivoulin of Saint Petersburg Technical University, Dr K A Mazine of Moscow Academy of Services Management, Dr B A Chakchir of Russian Medical Academy and Mrs

President of Saudi Majlis-e-Shoura due May 29

The first President of Majlis-e-Shoura of Saudi Arabia Sheikh Muhammad Ibrahim Bin Jubair will pay a three-day official visit to Bangladesh from May 29, reports UNB.

He will pay the visit on an invitation from Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury. He will lead a high level Saudi delegation consisting of some leading members of the Majlis.

During the visit, Jubair is expected to call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury, and Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad.

PRVAW demands justice for rape victims

By Staff Correspondent

Platform to Resist Violence Against Women (PRVAW) has expressed grave concern at the alarming rise in rape incidents across the country, says a press release.

At a meeting yesterday, PRVAW demanded immediate justice for the victims of rape by ensuring punishment to the culprits, who have been ruining the lives of minor girls, women and their families, the press release said.

Referring to the rapes of a minor girl and three teenagers in the city recently, PRVAW demanded immediate arrest of the rapists.

Meanwhile, PRVAW will hold a seminar on "Rape and Murder of Children and Women: Resistance and Remedy" on June 13 in the city to create awareness among the people and find solutions to the problem.

PRVAW has urged all conscientious citizens and concerned organisations to attend the seminar.

BAWOA regional committee formed

A 25-member regional committee for greater Mirpur area of Bangladesh Automobiles Workshop Owners' Association (BAWOA) was recently formed with Sheikh Nuruzzaman and MA Khaleque as its president and secretary respectively, says a press release.

The committee was at a meeting held at the Modern Technical College at section six of Mirpur with Saleh Ahmed in the chair recently.

The central committee secretary of BAWOA Mohammad Abdul Mannan was present on the occasion.

One hurt in road mishap

Gias Siddique, former senior assistant editor of Daily Meilat and former executive of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalist (BFUJ), was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) following a road accident at Motijheel in the city, reports BSS.

His condition was stated to be very critical. His colleagues and family members have requested fellow journalists and well-wishers to pray for his early recovery.

Obituary

Begum Aftabunnessa, wife of late Azizur Rahman, a deputy magistrate, died in a city clinic on Wednesday. She was 72, says a press release.

She has left behind two daughters and a member of grand children. Her qulkhwan will be held tomorrow at the residence of her eldest daughter Hosne Ara Shahed at 13, Hathkhol Road, Tikatul in the city.

The G8 Birmingham Summit Facing Global Challenges for the 21st Century

by The Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister of Great Britain

Britain is hosting the annual G8 Summit from 15-17 May. The British Prime Minister will be welcoming the leaders of the G8 countries to Birmingham for this Summit. He has prepared this article to be delivered on the inaugural session today.

TODAY, (Friday 15 May) I will be welcoming the leaders of the G8 countries to Birmingham for our annual summit. It will be an exercise in practical diplomacy. We will be discussing how we can respond to the issues that matter to our people — their jobs, their prospects, their environment and the threat from drugs and crime.

It will not be a grand occasion with banquets and fireworks, but a working summit, with a relaxed atmosphere that will give us time to get to grips with these difficult challenges.

Since the last UK Summit in 1991, the world has changed. The revolution in communications, economic globalisation, the Internet and massive capital flows are changing the way the world works. We must adapt to this new reality. And the G8 must take the lead in doing so.

Globalisation is not an abstract process. It affects the lives of all of us — from currency traders in the city of London, to factory workers in Shanghai and coffee farmers in Kenya. Teachers and tradesmen, functionaries and footballers, can all find their daily lives affected by events hundreds or even thousands of miles away. Saturday's FA Cup Final between two leading British teams will, for example, involve footballers of 19 different nationalities from 4 different continents.

To focus on these changes and the challenges we face in the next millennium, we have chosen three themes for the Birmingham Summit.

Firstly, we shall look at the world economy. The severity of the Asian crisis took us all by surprise. Though the financial situation has stabilised and I have no doubt about the underlying strength of Asia's economies, we must remain vigilant. We should not underestimate the impact of the crisis on the social fabric as well as the economies of the countries affected. Some bitter economic medicine has to be taken but enabling people here to be protected from the effects where we can. The implications for the rest of the world will only become clear in the course of this year.

Existing international institutions have done a good job,

but that does not mean we cannot do better. There are always new threats of instability and protectionism that we must guard against. G8 Foreign and Finance Ministers discussed this with the Heads of the IMF, World Bank and WTO when they met in London on 9 May and we will consider their conclusions in Birmingham.

Global changes affect the poor as much as — if not more than — the rich. At Birmingham, following the lead given in Lyon and Denver, we will

look at practical steps we can take to improve health, relieve debt and help poorer countries participate more fairly and effectively in global trade with a view to our goal of eliminating world poverty.

In particular, I want the G8 to take a lead in combating the menace of malaria. Malaria kills over 1 million people and affects another 500 million every year, nearly all of them in the world's poorest countries. If we can at least take this one step, our meeting will have been worthwhile.

If development is to be truly sustainable, we must take account of the environmental consequences of our actions. We will consider how to give added momentum to implementing the historic agreement reached at Kyoto on climate change. We know our people care about the environment. We need to meet

their concerns. Secondly, nearer home we must adapt to globalisation in ways that create jobs for our people. Our aim must be an adaptable work force in an adaptable economy. Each of us faces our own specific challenges, be it ageing, education or entrepreneurship. But we can learn much by comparing our experiences in these areas. Again, we shall be looking for practical steps we can take to improve employability and social inclusion in the job market, while encouraging sound economic growth.

Thirdly, one of most difficult challenges is the growth of international organised crime. Criminals have always sought to cross borders to escape the law. But the revolution in communications and technology has provided criminals with new ways to circumvent law enforcers, to plan deals and launder money. We must not be caught fighting 21st century crime with 19th century methods.

We will therefore be discussing in Birmingham the challenges posed by high-tech crime and trans-national criminal gangs, and the steps we must take to tackle them. It is up to us to respond effectively to this challenge ourselves, and encourage wider international cooperation too.

Behind much of this criminal activity lies the drugs trade, second only to the oil trade in its international value. It generates crime, ruins lives, poisons economies and undermines law and order across the globe. An effective and a coordinated campaign against this scourge is essential — tackling both supply and demand and looking at every aspect of this deadly business. Working together in the G8 is a key part of that.

I am determined that the G8 should be more than a talking shop. It has constantly shown its value as a forum in which to float ideas, develop working partnerships and agree coordinated action on the issues that matter to our people. At Birmingham we will face up to some of the most difficult problems the world faces, and we will solve them in two days. But working together we can map out the road to overcoming them.

