

## CHINA, SOUTH ASIA & NUCLEAR TESTING

# Reassessing mutual concerns

By ARVIND KUMAR

**A**FTER India detonated five nuclear devices of different varieties and yields a few weeks back Pakistan responded by testing six. An impression was created that it would go for further testing if required. China, a major power in the Asian region, has been closely monitoring all these developments in the subcontinent.

When India tested, China reacted sharply and emerged with a strong condemnation, uniting and mobilising the other members of the P-5 viz. the US, Russia, UK and France. However, there was an obvious lack of unanimity on the issue of collective condemnation and sanctions among the group of nuclear weapon States. This became evident at Birmingham where the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialised countries held their summit and discussed the future of their economies.

All the members, including Russia (which is a new entrant, initially it was called G-7) diverted their attention from the future scenario to India's testing. It was of course pleasantly surprising for India to find that eventually France, UK and Russia did not come out with any strong condemnation.

### Major question

The G-8 again met in London last fortnight to discuss the future scenario in the subcontinent after nuclear tests. The "London communiqué" reveals the fact that the industrialised nations are determined to maintain their monopoly in every sector. It was made more obvious at the meet that the existing nuclear powers would not allow anyone to gatecrash into their exclusive club. The *de facto* nuclear weapon States are worried about the G-8 moves and their strategies about their retention

of the nuclear weapons. Now the G-8 nations, who possess 90 per cent of the world's nuclear weapons, technology and material, plan to move forward with the abolition of nuclear weapons and control of fissile material and technology is a major question in the debate going on among the analysts and researchers working in the field.

### Muted response

While the US and other industrialised countries were busy dealing with the sanctions and other measures against India, Pakistan failed to exercise restraint on its own part. The world was watching closely because it has been told of the brittle attributes of Indo-Pakistani relations. China's reaction to Pakistan's detonations was not as critical as it was regarding India's. Indeed, Pakistan got a relatively muted response as far as criticism went. Among other things it tended to confirm that Pakistan has more clout than India abroad and can project its image more skilfully than India does.

This happened though no one expected Pakistan to test the nuclear devices at such short notice. It is interesting to note that Pakistan thinks it has equalled the number of tests with India but has forgotten that nuclear testing is not like playing cricket in which the team that scores more runs wins.

However, in the present context, it would still be unwise to dismiss Pakistan's capability. India, instead of not accepting the indigenous capability of Pakistan, should emphasise and evolve a strategy based on the premise that Pakistan possesses the technology, irre-

spective of its origin. This would help India in future.

In fact the time is propitious for India to capitalise on the point that Pakistan has all the capabilities. In the 1990s, India was subjected to challenges which made it increasingly difficult for the government to manage a coherent nuclear strategy. These included arms control initiatives designed specifically to contain India's capacities to develop a modern nuclear force to meet its security requirements. These had to be dealt with without impinging on the nuclear weapon States' abilities to retain and modernise their strategic forces. These considerations were explicit in the indefinite extension of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1995, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty of 1996 (which still needs the approval of India, Pakistan and North Korea) and the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), which is in the making.

At the same time, Pakistan declared its nuclear weapons capability and demonstrated its potential to launch nuclear strikes against targets deep into India. On its part, China continued its co-operation with Pakistan without drawing penalties from the non-proliferation advocates.

### Ultimate provocation

India could have tested earlier when China and France renewed their nuclear test programme after the non-nuclear weapon States had obliged the nuclear weapon States with an indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995. India also had an opportunity to go for testing when it blocked the CTBT in 1996. The resumption of sub-critical tests in the US in 1997 also provided grounds for testing in India.

Last, but not the least, the 'Ghauri' missile test by Pakistan with clandestine help from China turned out to be the ultimate provocation for India to test.

But now it is time that India presses for total nuclear disarmament. This task is, however, too difficult to accomplish because the Big-5 have a different agenda.

It is true that India was not able to convince the international community about the reasons for testing apart from the threat perception from China and the growing Sino-US-Pak nexus. It is a challenge to India's diplomatic community to make others understand why India had to undertake such tests. Convincing explanations are yet to come.

### No point in hostility

There has been a downslide in Sino-Indian relations because of the explicit statements made by some decision-makers in India. Yet there is still no point in maintaining hostility with China, among other reasons, because China's nuclear and missile capabilities outstrip those of India's, which has neither the nuclear firepower nor the delivery systems to pose a serious threat to the Chinese heartland. China, on the other hand, possesses the ability to wreak intolerable devastation on India.

The need of the hour, therefore, is not to adopt a confrontationist approach but to nurture relationships in which both sides understand each other's concerns. The time has come to understand the compulsions under which policies are formulated and how sovereignty and national interests can continue to be protected.

*The author is Research Associate at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore.*