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Long way from Pokharan

Raja Ramanna was truly a renaissance man

THE world associates Raja Ramanna's name with India's first nuclear test in May 1974. He was much more than a successful nuclear physicist. He was an accomplished pianist and a great lover of Carnatic music. He was intensely interested in philosophy, particularly Buddhist. He was a renaissance man.

Though he was converted to the strategy of deterrence in the early years of the nuclear age, it would surprise many people to know that he took very little interest in nuclear strategy. Once when Defence Minister C. Subramaniam asked him a question a nuclear strategy, he replied: "Sir, I am a physicist. That is not my area. You better ask Subrahmanyam (meaning me). That is his specialisation." For him nuclear weapons guaranteed security in a dangerous world and that security is a prerequisite for development.

As minister of state for defence, Ramanna in May 1990 spelt out for the first time the no-first-use doctrine. This was just before the Gates mission's arrival in this country. He said in Parliament that India could not think of using a nuclear weapon first but would retaliate if an aggressor used it first. I asked him whether that was a policy statement on behalf of the government. He said Prime Minister V.P. Singh asked him to reply to the debate in Parliament. He felt that was the proper stand for India to adopt.

Earlier in 1985, Ramanna as chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, and myself as director of IDSA submitted to Rajiv Gandhi two proposals on an agreement with Pakistan not to attack each other's nuclear facilities and on

no-first-use of nuclear weapons. Rajiv was inclined to accept both but a senior cabinet colleague objected to our proposing no-first-use at that stage since it might be interpreted as a sign of weakness. Rajiv did propose to General Zia that both countries should not attack each other's nuclear facilities. I do not know about the attitude of the Chinese nuclear scientist who made the bomb, whether he favoured the no-first-use doctrine or it was a political move on the part of Beijing. But the bombmakers from the US, Russia, UK and France were not known to have favoured no-first-use.



**IN
MEMORIAM**

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K. SUBRAHMANYAM

Ramanna did not think India needed anything more than a credible nuclear deterrent of fission weapons. But when a few weeks before the Shakti tests he was told Dr Chidambaram had developed the thermonuclear design he adopted the view that demonstrating that capability was part of deterrence. I am setting down these facts just to rebut the pro-western, anti-nuclear lobbies who have tried to project him as a kind of Dr Strangelove.

He grew up as a school student in the days of the Raj and had his education in London at the time of the transfer of power. He was therefore intensely nationalist, as were his fellow students in London, Dr K.N. Raj, K.R. Narayanan and Dr S. Gopal.

Ramanna's service to the nation went beyond the Department of Atomic Energy. His organising talents made the DRDO what it is today. He had a knack of spotting talents and advancing them. The proof: P.K. Iyengar, Chidambaram, Arunachalam and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.

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