

## SAY NO TO INDIAN & PAKISTANI BOMBS!

by Pervez Hoodbhoy

The Indian nuclear test of May 11 was the subject of a talk at MIT on May 12 by Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy, professor of physics at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad and currently visiting professor at the University of Maryland. He was introduced by Dr. Abha Sur of The Alliance For A Secular And Democratic South Asia, and the event was sponsored by The Alliance, Pakistan Students Society at MIT, and the MIT Program In Science, Technology, and Society. The talk had been originally scheduled a month earlier on the subject of the India-Pakistan nuclear and missile race; the near coincidence with the Indian tests was purely accidental. Now that Pakistan has followed suit, the appeals for restraint seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Nevertheless, the compelling argument presented here by Dr. Hoodbhoy is relevant even in the post test insane euphoric phase.

The following is a synopsis of Dr. Hoodbhoy's presentation. A petition was subsequently presented towards the end of the meeting (reproduced below) and signed by an overwhelming majority of those present. Readers are encouraged to send their signatures by email and forward this message.

Friends,

This is a unique gathering here today at MIT, organized jointly by Indians and Pakistanis. I do not know of a similar event anywhere else but can only hope that there will be many such others. Together we stand, joined in sorrow, disbelief, shock, and anger at yesterday's event. We stand here to challenge the merchants of hate and destruction, the makers and promoters of weapons that kill by the millions, and the megalomaniacs who think that greatness comes from the power to commit mass murder. We stand in protest against the ideologies of hate created and promoted by our governments, nurtured by the mass media and school textbooks, and remorselessly hammered for decades into the minds of innocent children on both sides of the border.

There cannot be any doubt that a grave new situation has arisen with yesterday's nuclear tests. The tremors shall continue to shake the subcontinent in the years and decades ahead, and the peoples of India and Pakistan stand closer to the brink of disaster than ever before. Once the euphoria passes, there will surely be much to regret. But now we are witnessing grotesque and obscene celebrations of the power to destroy. Today the corks are popping and the champagne is flowing in Delhi. "We will soon bring Pakistan to its knees", crows the president of the BJP, Khushabau Thakre. Barely a month ago it was Pakistan that had been joyous after the launch of the Ghauri missile. Euphoric crowds had made their pilgrimage to the Kahuta laboratory, and Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Gauhar Ayub, bragged about having overtaken India in missile development. It is hard to imagine greater stupidity.

In the remainder of this talk I shall address five key questions which we must reflect upon in order to see what lies ahead.

FIRST, will Pakistan indeed be "brought to its knees" by Indian nuclear tests? The answer is probably "yes" if the Pakistani leadership reacts as Mr. Thakre and his BJP gang would like it to, and "no", if Pakistan acts cautiously and wisely. Should it fall into the trap and test an atomic device, the Muslim-haters of the BJP will have the pleasure of seeing Pakistan destroyed economically as rest of the world turns the screws. Certainly, international sanctions are bound to be imposed upon India; these may cause it considerable pain but will not cause it to collapse. But Pakistan is different. Sanction will deal its fragile, dependent, economy a devastating, perhaps crippling, blow and plunge the country into a horrific state worse than that in Indonesia today. If Pakistan tries to match India bomb for bomb, missile for missile, and tank for tank, it will shatter as certainly as a glass vase dropped upon a concrete floor.

At the risk of having to say "I told you so", I will nevertheless repeat that peace activists in Pakistan have, for the last 15 years, been ceaselessly urging their government not to get into a nuclear competition with India. This is not a race that Pakistan can ever win. That this was correct has now been proven beyond a shadow of doubt. We had consistently argued that the real threat to Pakistan is internal — low rates of production coupled with an education system which collapsed years ago. I was therefore astonished — and delighted — just a week ago General Jehangir Karamat, the most powerful man in Pakistan, came out with an amazing statement saying that Pakistan's greatest challenge was not India but its economy and

internal situation. Our “heresies” in years past were now being repeated as an Establishment truth! Will the enlightenment survive the Indian tests? If it does, then there is hope.

SECOND, is India now a super-power? More secure after testing nuclear weapons and embarking on the path to inducting nuclear weapons in its arsenal? With 400 million famished and deprived people, and millions living on the streets of Bombay and Calcutta, it is simply fantasy to think that India is now a super-power. It cannot become so even if it explodes 300 instead of 3 bombs. Of course, national security is the formal reason given for the tests. But I think that India has become far more insecure after having tested. For one, China has been unnecessarily provoked. And, for another, Pakistan is in a state of deep alarm. Pakistan has long had a nuclear programme and, quite probably, has nuclear weapons. In the unlikely situation that it does not have operational weapons today, it surely will in years to come after being so directly threatened by India. A test in the next few days or weeks is possible but, whether that happens or not, the fact will remain that Pakistan will now move every muscle to have a substantial nuclear arsenal and delivery capability.

It is interesting to note that there are quite a few people in the Indian establishment who dismiss the possibility that Pakistan is capable of nuclear weapons. In pleading for nuclear restraint by India with such people, many people (including my self) have been astonished by the certainty of their belief. Numerous examples exist that illustrate the willingness of Indian policy makers to engage in such self-deception. Until it was confirmed from multiple sources and could be denied no further, many in India refused to believe that the Ghauri had been launched — successfully. It would be a tragic mistake for India to think that Pakistan does not, or will not soon be able to, have operational atomic weapons.

THIRD, does India have the “right” to have nuclear weapons given that there are five declared nuclear weapons states in the world? The answer is NO! Nuclear weapons are evil, mass destroyers of human life, and morally indefensible. No country should possess them, and it is the moral responsibility of the citizens of every country to try and prevent their country from ever possessing these horrible weapons. The United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, and now India, must all be made to renounce their nuclear weapons. Israel and Pakistan should be forced to give up their programmes as well.

But having said this, I think that India and Pakistan have even less

“right” than the 5 NW states to possess these weapons because the chances of the weapons being used against each other is very, very significant. It is foolish to idly debate this when tens of millions stand in very real danger of annihilation. Academic discussions of “right” and “wrong” can go on endlessly, but this is a real, stark, danger. People of conscience from India and Pakistan must speak out against nuclearization on the subcontinent.

FOURTH, is India-Pakistan nuclear war just for alarmists? Until something happens, there will be no proof either way. Of course, if it does happen then to debate this question will be rather pointless. But in arguing this matter, I find that there are many people who think that the chances of subcontinental nuclear war are incredibly remote. Such people have chosen to live in a fools paradise. It is, I shall admit, quite unlikely that nuclear war will begin as the result of serious strategic deliberations by the Indian or Pakistani leadership. Far more likely is nuclear war by miscalculation or accident, and the self-generating dynamics of a crisis. Let’s look at what history has to teach us. In 1965, General Ayub Khan provoked a war with India after he miscalculated India’s response to Pakistani paratroopers dropped in Kashmir with the aim of fomenting an uprising by Kashmiris against unpopular Indian rule. Indian retaliated by attacking across the international border and a full-fledged war erupted. In 1987, General K. Sunderji initiated Operation Brasstacks as a training exercise for Indian forces but nearly precipitated a war which neither side wanted, and was only narrowly averted. In May 1990, the rise in temperature in Kashmir lead to furious India troop movements which caused the Pakistanis to believe that an invasion was imminent. Many Pakistanis think that the Indians backed off after Pakistan began loading nuclear weapons on to F-16’s waiting at Chaklala Air Force base near Rawalpindi. In fact such an event probably never occurred, but the myth lives on. There are probably many other illustrations of faulty intelligence and miscalculations leading to confrontations and near-confrontations. We should all be exceedingly uncomfortable knowing this.

FIFTH, and finally, who [*sic*] will be immediate consequences of the Indian bomb test? Let us first think of what will NOT change. The militancy in Kashmir is not likely to be materially affected by the nuclear tests; the horrific brutalities will continue and wounds will continue to bleed. The BJP has nothing but the brutal fist of iron to show, Pakistan will continue to let militants use its territory to launch cross-border attacks, and Kashmiris will continue to die at the hands of both the security forces and militants. The miseries of Kashmiris caught in a proxy war will not decrease, ordinary

Indians and Pakistanis will bear the costs of militarization and conflict and life will go on as usual.

What will change is economic stability and growth in both countries. Indian will suffer because of the sanctions imposed upon it, and Pakistan because it will almost certainly increase its spending on defense. Above and beyond else, we will creep closer towards war. There will be no winners, just loser.

These are difficult times indeed. The markers of war loudly bellow their victory over those who ask for peace. But reason favours us, not them, and reason must ultimately triumph. Geography has inextricably linked together our destinies; the destruction of one country cannot be without great harm to the other. We recognize that pure accident — not some great grand design — caused us to be born on opposite sides of the borders, and that conflict is futile. Though our numbers be small at present, the fact is that our mere presence today in this hall is sufficient to tell the world — and ourselves — that ultimately peace and cooperation shall triumph over war and confrontation.

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