

From New Delhi by Ramtanu Maitra

Pressing India on non-proliferation

Australia's Robert Hawke is riding shotgun for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in South Asia.

What Australian Prime Minister Robert Hawke says rarely catches the attention of anyone in India. But Hawke's June 28 announcement in Washington that he told the U.S. administration that Australia "will and must try to press" India and Pakistan to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty will certainly raise a few eyebrows in New Delhi.

Hawke also told the press conference that the Indian prime minister, "my friend Rajiv Gandhi," had told him that India's improved relations with Pakistan and with China might enable it to reduce its military spending. Hawke did not explain how this revelation relates to his decision to press India on non-proliferation.

Hawke is obviously unaware that India's decision not to be a signatory goes back a long time before his "friend Rajiv Gandhi" came to power. He has also chosen to ignore the fact that the decision was reached through careful evaluation of the content of the treaty, and not because, as Hawke implied to the Washington media, insufficient pressure had been exerted on India.

India has not only refused to sign the treaty, but has openly and repeatedly condemned it as a discriminatory document designed to hurt the non-nuclear nations. India had no difficulty in recognizing the glaring fact that the treaty is nothing more than cartel of the nuclear weapons states to help them monopolize nuclear technology.

According to the treaty, the nuclear powers undertake not to transfer nuclear weapons or any special nuclear

materials that would enable a country to build nuclear weapons to the non-nuclear weapons states. But the treaty left enough loopholes for the nuclear "haves" to reserve the option to transfer both to countries of their choice, and they can also rely on nuclear-war doctrines for their security, train their troops in the use of nuclear weapons, and take part in nuclear scenario exercises.

The treaty also does not prevent a nuclear power, while formally retaining the ownership of weapons, from physically transferring their possession. While the treaty is nominally strict in preventing non-nuclear powers from getting the equipment and special nuclear materials (prevention of horizontal proliferation), the nuclear powers, at the same time, can pile up their nuclear arsenals indefinitely (vertical proliferation).

Moreover, the barrage of criticism and outright censure India received when it exploded a peaceful nuclear device in 1974 has left a sharp memory, while the United States and the Soviet Union—being certified nuclear superpowers—explode such devices when they please.

Even where the treaty was non-discriminatory, the nuclear powers have moved to make it discriminatory. Article IV of the treaty contains a "promise" to permit transfer of peaceful nuclear technology. But the London Club of nuclear suppliers, which consists of the nuclear powers and what Henry Kissinger calls the "industrial democracies," drew up a "trigger list"

of nuclear materials which will not be supplied to non-nuclear weapons states unless they accept the full "safeguards." In this context, the United States' recent attempt to raise the bogey of reactor-grade plutonium being used in India to make nuclear weapons has not gone unnoticed here.

There is more to it. As a result of the 1962 Sino-Indian war and the Chinese detonation of the first atomic device in October 1964, a nuclear debate began in India. Although India shifted from its earlier stance of "no bomb" formulated by the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to "no bomb now" under his successor, the late Lal Bahadur Shastri, India took notice of the nuclearization of China's military. Its subsequent development of short- and medium-range, and intercontinental missiles has added no comfort to India's security.

The latest available information indicates that China has shifted from its doctrine of "People's War," where a million rifle-wielding Chinese prepare to defend their country, to "People's War under modern conditions"—a vague enough name for the nuclear war doctrine. Several notable exercises have been held by the Chinese Navy, including a June 1988 naval exercise under nuclear conditions with the scenario of an aircraft-based nuclear attack at a port with submarine chasers and escort vessels.

This is not to suggest that India must build nuclear weapons. But with the proliferation of nuclear weapons in China and the re-emergence of the old, ruthless Chinese leadership following the Tiananmen massacre—incidentally, that made the Australian prime minister weep for the second time in public—no one, including Mr. Hawke, should be surprised that India does not want to trade away its freedom to build its own defense according to its needs.