



# THE TIMES OF INDIA

## A Thought for Today

*Arms control so easily becomes an incantation rather than policy.*

— RICHARD PERLE, U.S. POLITICIAN

## Merchants of Death

The Pakistani Prime Minister, Ms Benazir Bhutto, has returned home from her visit to the United States and France with a bounty that should keep her generals happy. Having booked the gift she picked up in Washington direct to Islamabad, she stopped en route in Paris to shop around for a deal on the Mirage aircraft. General Dynamics, the U.S. firm that manufactures the F-16 fighter aircraft, may be miffed about the Mirage deal, but U.S. arms suppliers are richer by a neat \$368 million. At another time, in the midst of the Cold War, this would have been regarded as peanuts, but at a time when the U.S. arms industry is hungry for markets, even peanuts are good diet. As a recent report of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) stated, U.S. companies, which had no need to seek foreign sales in order to be profitable in the 1980s, have had to do so in the 1990s as the level of U.S. national arms procurement expenditure has fallen in real terms. "From the perspective of governments and the arms industry, international sales are becoming increasingly important," concluded the SIPRI report. The pressure on U.S. defence companies has been all the more with the emergence of competitive rivals from within Europe, especially France, and in Israel. Indeed, France has emerged as a major weapons exporter in recent years, willing to extend its power and influence in far away regions to expand its market share. Security analysts have charged France with fuelling wars in Africa, for instance, and cynically arming both sides to the conflict.

What should India's response be? At the diplomatic level the Indian government must exhibit, as it has indeed done so far, a degree of maturity and sobriety which is associated with a large nation and a major power. Ms Bhutto's shrillness and impetuosity should not be echoed from New Delhi and Mr P.V. Narasimha Rao did well in New York not to be provoked by Ms Bhutto into commenting on bilateral matters. On a parallel track, India must forthwith demonstrate its ability to defend its national interest by deploying the Prithvi and Agni missiles and by strengthening its defence capability. In this context, the recent criticism of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) by ill-informed and motivated critics is both mischievous and dangerous. The DRDO has played a very useful and creative role not only in making the nation more self-reliant in defence, but has also been a technology developer, something that can be said about very few Indian enterprises. Admittedly, there is a case for demanding greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness in its functioning, as indeed there is in the case of the entire manufacturing sector in India, both in the public and private sectors. What is often not recognised is the extent to which the DRDO and other defence production industries have become market-friendly, developing new products and technologies across a wide range, including food products and garments. To put further pressure on it at a time when global arms manufacturers are widening their markets in South Asia may well result in Indian defence industry demanding greater access to foreign markets. Such a race for markets is not in the interest of world peace and must be universally shunned.

my letter refers to this & the following articles.