

## Lured Into Bondage

The debate over Indo-US nuclear deal continues, though in a low-key fashion but it continues to lack transparency. The official left has been accusing the Congress-led UPA government of surrendering India's nuclear sovereignty to America for long without really elaborating the specific areas where India is going to surrender. Interestingly, right-wing regional and casteist parties of UPA do not bother about 'nuclear patriotism'. They have a lot of issues on their agenda—quota, water dispute, localism, illegal benefits and all that. They are satisfied with their ministries.

For one thing, America's nuclear policy for South Asia is not India-specific. Nor does it show extra benevolence towards India's nuclear managers by agreeing to supply nuclear fuel without which India's insignificant nuclear power industry may go bankrupt. Sanctions were imposed on India and Pakistan as well. But they did not work. What America has achieved in Pakistan by lifting sanctions is unbelievable. Secrecy does not reveal the real picture or to what extent America has penetrated in Pakistan's nuclear establishment. It is a matter of time that a Pakistani dimension will be added to Indo-US nuclear understanding. As it is partly or wholly secret, it can develop in depth without a formal agreement and it has happened in case of Pakistan where American defence personnel now manage Pakistan's nuclear machine.

'Pakistan has 30 to 40 warheads'. So said the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency El Baradei a couple of months ago.

El Baradei was in reality expressing fear that "nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of extremist groups in Pakistan or Afghanistan." But America lost no time to intervene and ally that fear.

The Strategic Plans Division (SPD), which is the Pakistani agency responsible for handling nuclear weapons, exudes confidence that it can safely protect the country's "crown jewels." The SPD is a key beneficiary of the recently disclosed secret \$100 million grant by the Bush administration, the purpose of which is to make Pakistan's nuclear weapons safer. Maybe there are more skeletons in the cupboard.

This money has been put to use. Indeed, ever since September 11, 2001, there has been a regular traffic of Pakistani military officers to and from the United States for coaching in nuclear safety techniques. While multiple layers of secrecy make it hard to judge success, the improvement in the SPD's public relations is palpable. PowerPoint presentations, guided tours of military headquarters and calculated expressions of openness have impressed foreign visitors.

Money talks. And \$100 million special grant seems to be paying dividends to American strategists.

It does not matter whether there is a civilian or a military government in Islamabad. America has established virtual control over Pakistan's nuclear programme, thanks to Musharraf's too much dependence on America. India's increased bilateral cooperation with America in nuclear arena may go the Pakistan way as everything nuclear is shrouded with mystery—after all

American's geo-strategic policy in South Asia in the changed global context, demands a unified command. □□□