

COMMENT

K a r g i l a n d S u b m a r i n e

This year Kargil Day was A low key affair though Prime minister otherwise harried at home, as just a few days back he had to face flak from the Opposition for his mellowed stance towards Pakistan. Delinking cross-border terrorism from composite bi-lateral dialogue he actually gave undue leverage to Pakistan. So said his critics. Whether India beat back Pakistani intruders in Kargil or Pakistan retreated under Uncle Sam's pressure was disputed even in 1999 when sub-continentals were on the verge of nuclear confrontation.

Even China refused to oblige Islamabad by accepting Pakistani adventure—or misadventure—as a *fait accompli*. But Prime Minister finally saved the all important day by launching India's first indigenously built nuclear powered submarine. But the launch of advanced technology project was initiated when Indira Gandhi was Prime Minister 25 years ago. A 25-year-period is a short time in Indian march for self-reliance. Nothing was disclosed about how much Russian expertise was utilised in building the sub-marine. What is more two years of sea trials will be required before *Arihant* can be commissioned in Indian Navy. Self-reliance moves here at snail's pace.

But a tiny nation North Korea has the audacity to defy the lone super-power by showing the world what they mean by self-reliance even in the nuclear field. Not very long ago North Korea declared to weaponise its stock-piles of plutonium and to pursue uranium enrichment in defiance of a UN sanctions resolution. This follows two recent nuclear bomb tests, one of which was succesful, and a number of ballastic missile tests.

The proposed sanctions included interdiction of North Korean ships at sea, which the US administration has talked up as an option. The confrontation with the US has been deepened further by the slow trial of two American women reporters, who have been sentenced to 12 years of hard labour in a North Korean prison camp. North Korea is being condemned and criticised even by its friend China for aggravating the nuclear crisis. But North Korea's self-reliance (or *Juche* as it is officially known) is a matter of concern to its adversaries, particularly America and its trusted client South Korea.

Incidentally *Juche* is a curious admixture of marxism and Korean nationalism. No doubt Kim Jong II seems to be forging a role for North Korea as a minor nuclear power, in a world in which nuclear weapons are a threat even in local conflicts as the people in the Indian sub-continent face today. The launching of nuclear submarine was in reality aimed at sending a message to Pakistan, albeit China was considered in unofficial circles. For all practical purposes China is a big player in nuclear arena. India's nuclear programme at sea, or in the air, is now increasingly dependent on America. All things considered this launching of submarine doesn't mean much in the real world of war and peace. But it will certainly speed up arms race in the sub-continent affecting millions of poor and marginalised on both sides of the fence. □□□