

for a second strike. If India had assembled no bombs and had lost its nuclear installations to a Pakistani first strike, such a strategy could succeed.

To pre-empt such a possibility, the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi reportedly pondered a conventional attack to destroy Pakistan's nuclear facilities before it could develop the Bomb. She did not carry out such a strike, however, and her son and successor, Rajiv, last December reached an agreement with Pakistani President Mohammed Zia Ul-Haq that neither side would attack the other's nuclear installations.

"It would be criminally stupid to bomb their nuclear facilities,"

says Subrahmanyam. "They would then bomb ours, and we have a lot more to lose: theirs is a uranium nuclear facility, whereas ours is plutonium" (and therefore much more lethal).

On the other hand, the hawks have persuaded Mr. Gandhi to spurn Pakistan's proposal for mutual inspection of each side's nuclear installations – on either a bilateral or a multilateral basis – to ensure that fissile material is not secretly diverted from civilian to military purposes. Mr. Gandhi contends that such surveillance can easily be circumvented, but a more

important reason for the rebuff seems to be his

Government's determination not to tie its hands.

Whereas Subrahmanyam and other hawks want Prime Minister Gandhi to keep his nuclear options open, Professor Dharendra Sharma of Jawaharlal Nehru University's Centre for Studies in Science Policy wants a clear-cut disavowal of nuclear weaponry. His Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (COSNUP), which includes two retired Supreme Court judges, a few MPs, some retired military officers and several prominent writers and academics, has called for a nuclear-free South Asia.

These anti-nuclear activists were alarmed by Mr. Gandhi's statements in Paris in the summer of 1985; he had hinted that India might covertly assemble and deploy nuclear weapons in response to Pakistani moves. Professor Sharma insists that such a clandestine policy would be contrary to a 1962 statute, passed by Parliament, which says that the Indian nuclear programme is solely for peaceful purposes.

COSNUP was reassured by, and takes some of the credit for, a subsequent statement by Mr. Gandhi in Tokyo which appeared to contradict his utterances in Paris. But Sharma's group remains fearful that "military-industrial interests" will prevail and turn India into a nuclear weapons state.

Professor Sharma downplays the Pakistani threat as a motive for Indian nuclearization. "We are not threatened by any country," he maintains. "Pakistan can survive only on the goodwill of India or with the guarantee of a superpower. Both of those conditions were absent in the 1971 war. I put the onus on us. We are responsible for driving the people of Pakistan to look for such a suicidal alternative. We began the nuclear programme. We have a certain responsibility for the welfare of South Asia."

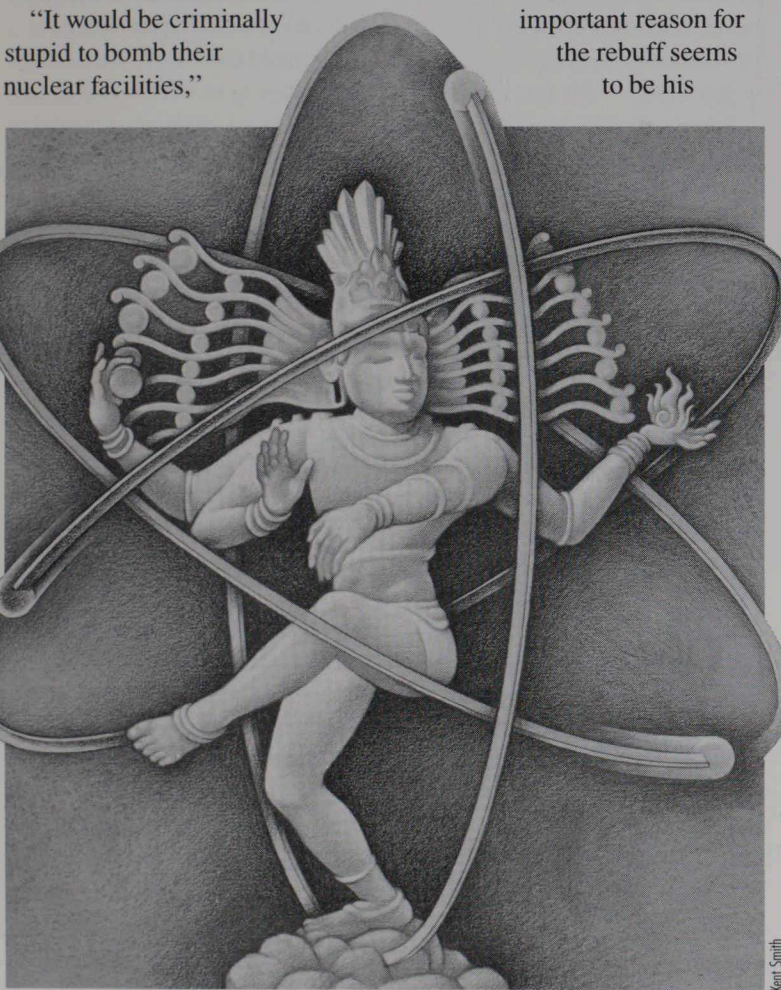
Professor Sharma believes that

India's nuclear power programme was developed as a "showpiece to present to the poor." He insists that its electrical output has been so limited and so expensive that only military intentions can explain India's massive allocation of scarce resources to nuclear power. Moreover, he believes that nuclear arms are much more likely to be built for international status than for security. "Our goal is to be a superpower by 1995. The day we have nuclear rockets, the United States will respect us."

Whatever its future moves on nuclear arms, India is likely to shroud them in considerable secrecy. The Indian defence and atomic energy budgets have never been debated in Parliament. There has been some discussion of the Indian nuclear option in the press, and there is considerable elite support for India's leadership in the Five-Continent disarmament initiative aimed at the superpowers. But, COSNUP aside, no widespread public scepticism has developed over India's own contribution to nuclear proliferation.

Subrahmanyam explains the remoteness of Indian public opinion from the nuclear issue in these terms: "Debate is a reflection of the amount of knowledge in the country. If the stock of that knowledge is not adequate, there will not be much debate." But Sharma retorts that the government has created a climate hostile to the expression of anti-nuclear dissent: "We have not reached the stage of development where it is possible to oppose war preparations without being considered unpatriotic." □

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■ In 1974, after India had tested its nuclear device, Canada suspended its "nuclear co-operation" with that country. Indian officials argued that the uranium fuel, which had been used to produce the device's plutonium, was not imported from Canada and that therefore India had not breached the original agreement between the two countries. In 1976, after trying unsuccessfully to work out an agreement which would fall in line with its non-proliferation policy, Canada ended all nuclear-related exports to India.

Pakistan was also unwilling to agree to the provisions laid down in the 1974 version of Canada's non-proliferation policy. In 1976, Canada terminated its nuclear co-operation with Pakistan. – Ed.