

(Mr. Dubey, India)

nuclear-weapon Powers, finding that their independent nuclear deterrence has been rendered obsolete, may, either singly or jointly, go in for their own ABM system, irrespective of the cost it may involve.

Moreover, in spite of the hundreds of billions of dollars to be spent on them, the new weapon systems will not provide full protection. And to quote the words of the Italian Nobel laureate, Eugenio Montale, in a somewhat different context, it is not only the small fishes that would escape from the net. As already pointed out, some categories of missiles, such as the ground-hugging Cruise missiles and Stealth bombers are unlikely to come within the targets of the new ABM weapon system. Taking into account even the lowest percentage of leakage, enough nuclear weapons will escape the ABM weapons to reach their targets and wreak havoc with human civilization. Moreover, the new system would be vulnerable to counter-measures which can acquire a variety of forms. In spite of these loopholes, it is sought to justify the development of these weapons on the cynical ground that it would destroy the first-strike capability of the other side to the maximum extent possible and impose on it an intolerable financial and material burden in the process of developing its own ABM system.

Moreover, there are strong reasons to believe that the development and acquisition of these new weapon systems will trigger nuclear war in the process. Taking the ASAT system first, the destruction of an adversary's satellite is not an event lost in the wilderness of outer space. It would be an attack on one of the most advanced components of the war machine of the other side which will most likely provoke retaliation.

As regards the new ABM system, a very dangerous situation will arise when one of the super-Powers is able to deploy its system and the other is still in the process of catching up — a situation which may prevail for a long time. One can visualise two scenarios in that event. In the first scenario, the former may decide that it can take out the missile force of the other side in a first strike and it can protect its own force from retaliation. The new ABM technology thus makes recourse to nuclear weapons relatively easier and safer for the Power enjoying superiority in this field. In the second scenario, the latter super-Power which has still not caught up, may be provoked into a panicky pre-emptive nuclear attack.

When both the super-Powers deploy their own space-based ABM systems, it will fundamentally change the entire international security situation and international power relations. The world will revert to the bi-polar era of the early 50s under conditions aggravated by the immense increase in the force and efficiency of the weapon systems. The reversal to the strategic bipolarity of the world will have such serious consequences as much strengthened technological, economic and political hegemony, reducing all other nations to security dependence, resorting to limited or protracted nuclear war in localized theatres far from any worry that such wars would engulf their own territories, and even encouragement to surrogate Powers to develop their own nuclear weapons to be used for the strategic purpose of the super-Powers. Disarmament will be the first casualty in such a situation.