

Lasting peace

When plague broke out in Surat a few years ago, there were several reasons attributed to the spread of the dreaded epidemic. All sorts of reasons were given ranging from 'God's curse' to unclean surroundings.

But one possible cause for the outbreak, which most experts agreed upon, was the use of chemical weapons. This was the only way an epidemic of this nature, which was thought to be permanently wiped off from the face of the earth, could re-emerge. Chemical weapons are the deadliest armaments we have today. Chemical warfare involves weapons of mass destruction. Guns, tanks and missiles are the traditional versions of weaponry used in wars. They don't cause destruction of the kind expected of chemical weaponry. Chemical weapons can wipe off large populace within no time. Letting radioactive gases into the atmosphere, spreading deadly neutrons, release of epidemic causing microbes (which wreaked havoc in the bygone era) and release of poisonous gases, all come under chemical weaponry. Unlike traditional weapons, they not only target warring soldiers but destroy innocent people as well. Almost all countries are known to possess chemical weapons with the US heading the list.

In a significant move, the US, which till now was only preaching the non-proliferation of chemical weapons, has joined hands with other leading countries of the world in a treaty recently (Chemical Weapons Convention - CWC) to eliminate chemical warfare permanently. This is a feather in the cap for Indian initiative towards world peace and tranquility. India was one of the first countries to sign the treaty and is presently the chairman of the executive committee, which manages the treaty. Unlike the arbitrary treaties like the NPT and CTBT, CWC is comprehensive. It prohibits the manufacture, possession and use of such weapons and has asked the member countries to destroy its stockpiles in a phased manner within the next ten years.

India is a known possessor of chemical weapons. With one of the world's biggest chemical industries, India can put up a formidable challenge to any chemical war threat. But the fact that it is one of the first countries to sign the CWC and is eager to see it implemented, talks volumes about its commitment to world peace.

It serves well for the US to understand India's commitment to a harmonious world, and stop its threat to impose sanctions for India's alleged development of missile technology. Though China has signed the treaty, Pakistan has been reluctant in ratifying its earlier consent for the treaty. CWC should ensure that these countries also adhere to chemical disarmament. The CWC should also include nuclear weapons under the chemical weapons category to put an end to the dreaded destroyer.

This, along with a general disarmament would definitely bring lasting peace to the violence stricken world.

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