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Reviewing a review

In his editorial 'Reviewing a review' in *Current Science* (1998, **75**, 869), Balaram says 'The journal *Nature* in the characteristically mischievous manner of a successful magazine has provided ample and visible space' to a review of the book entitled *Nonsense in Indian Science* by Dilip Salwi. Balaram suspects that 'the *Nature* review targets a particularly susceptible section of readers abroad'. That these observations are quite true are strongly borne out by the fact that *Nature* can completely ignore commentary even if it is in response to the *Nature's* own editorial.

Recently I had submitted a writeup in the form of Correspondence to *Nature* in response to its editorial (1998, **393**, 291) on Pokharan nuclear tests (in India). It was intended to explain the concerns and impressions of an Indian to the readers whom the *Nature* had addressed in its editorial. And this is all the more necessary since the Indian side has not been presented so far after the editorial. My comments were not published. *Nature* seems to be 'selective' such that if comments – however balanced – do not conform to perceptions of *Nature*, the likelihood of their finding a place becomes very remote indeed.

I reproduce below the brief writeup sent to *Nature*, which may interest *Current Science* readers.

'Sir, On 2 August 1939, just about a month before the Second World War,

Einstein had written to President Roosevelt referring to Nazi Germany stopping sale of uranium from Czechoslovakian mines and possibility of nuclear chain reactions in a mass of uranium which could lead to development of a powerful destructive device. The Einstein–Roosevelt correspondence provided stimulus for the Manhattan Project and in October, 1941 America decided to go ahead with full-scale development of an atomic bomb. Only the security perceptions of the allied forces had led Einstein to persuade Roosevelt for appropriate scientific studies for development of nuclear weapons. In later years Einstein, however, regretted having signed the letters to Roosevelt.

India and China started on a path of economic and industrial development practically at the same time in early 50s. Since then India has faced serious conflicts once with China in 1962 and thrice with Pakistan. Over this period, China has gone ahead with its nuclear weapons and missile programmes. Till the end of 1995 it is reported to have undertaken 45 nuclear tests and it possessed over 450 nuclear weapons. During the last 25 years, Pakistan has also acquired nuclear and missile capabilities with tacit support of some other countries. Indian tests in May 1998 were, therefore, entirely for its own security perceptions.

Till date, the five established nuclear powers have had large number of nu-

clear tests and have accumulated arsenals of nuclear weapons. France is reported to have conducted 210 nuclear tests and possesses over 500 nuclear weapons. Britain is also understood to have conducted 45 nuclear tests and possesses over 200 nuclear weapons. As a matter of fact Britain agreed to ban the tests only after acquiring the Trident. Apparently these steps by Britain and France would have followed their own security concerns in spite of NATO umbrella and not due to any craving for international status.

It is heartening to find that *Nature* has asked the five nuclear powers to 'take genuinely significant steps to cut their nuclear stock-piles'. India has already put a moratorium on further tests and has been pleading for a non-discriminatory CTBT so that the entire world could be free of the nuclear weapons. India's stand has been appreciated by SAARC and by NAM countries. It is sincerely hoped that many more sane voices from around the world will join *Nature* in appealing the five nuclear powers to a quicker realization of a non-nuclear world – a cherished dream of mankind!

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