

India seeks change in IAEA priorities

by Susan Maitra and Ramtanu Maitra

Sharply criticizing the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), India's Atomic Energy Commission chairman, Dr. P.K. Iyengar, reminded attendees at the recently held General Conference of the IAEA in Vienna that the agency's statutes dictate that it "shall seek to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health, and prosperity, subject, of course, to safeguards against misutilization for any military purpose."

IAEA chairman Hans Blix told the U.N. General Assembly the first week in October that his agency will carry out special inspections of the nuclear programs of various countries, and that if the countries do not meet the criteria of the IAEA or do not fully cooperate with the inspections, then the agency will hand the matter over to the U.N. Security Council, which has powers of enforcement. Blix said that the nuclear programs of Algeria, Pakistan, India, and Israel are of particular concern.

Dr. Iyengar's criticism at the Vienna conference referred obliquely to the IAEA's role in the independent inspection by a U.N. team of the Iraqi nuclear facilities. Dr. Iyengar stated that such "intrusive inspection activities" are "well beyond the statutory role of the agency and the provision of safeguard agreements." Dr. Iyengar added: "A single international experience should not be allowed to fundamentally alter the character of the agency, as spelt in its statute." Iyengar called for a "return to first principles" in reviewing the role of the agency. Indeed, over the years, the IAEA has become highly compromising to the whims of the states with a developed nuclear weapons capability. In the early 1980s, when the United States backed away from its commitment to supply enriched uranium fuel for the two U.S.-supplied boiling water reactors at Tarapur, because India refused to bow to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the stranglehold of the nuclear powers and their allies over the agency became tighter. In 1983, an attempt was made to demote India within the agency and take away its permanent seat in the board of governors. At the same time, the IAEA's General Conference approved the membership of mainland China.

The 34-member board of governors consists of 12 "designated" members representing both globally and regionally

advanced countries. The remaining 22 are elected for two years, with 11 of them retiring and being replaced every year when all 111 members meet at the annual conference. India has been one of the "designated" or automatically reelected members since the IAEA's inception.

India has long been critical of the NPT itself, which has become a license for vertical proliferation and is used exclusively to prevent horizontal proliferation—a process which has created a handful of nuclear haves amidst a sea of nuclear have-nots. At the time of IAEA's birth in 1957, the father of India's atomic energy program, the late Dr. Hami Bhabha, declared that India was accepting the safeguard system only "provisionally" and in the hope that shortly, there would be enough progress toward disarmament and "these measures will apply to all countries equally or will become unnecessary."

Proliferation of 'safeguards'

One of the direct effects of the IAEA's capitulation to the nuclear weapons states has been the increasing allocation of the IAEA budget for safeguards. Dr. Iyengar pointed out that the provisions in the statute for safeguarding nuclear materials and facilities were laid to prevent misutilization of peaceful atomic energy. "However," Iyengar said, "these provisions should not result in a major proportion of the overall budget being consumed by the safeguards function alone."

Though the agency was established primarily pursuant to President Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" program, it has expanded its safeguards and regulatory functions at the cost of promotional activities. A former Indian ambassador to Vienna, referring to this phenomenon, mused, "The fomer duchy has become a kingdom within the empire, and now threatens to overtake the empire itself."

Addressing this disparity in activities that has made the IAEA less useful than it could be and calling for a "return to first principles," Dr. Iyengar continued: "In this context, the enormous energy requirements of developing countries is an area which suggests itself as an obvious choice for the agency to play a leading role. The recently held symposium on Electricity and Environment in Helsinki also highlighted the need to contain the carbon dioxide emissions through considerable reduction in burning fossil fuels for generating electricity. In this context, nuclear energy is an obvious alternative.

"There is an immediate need to develop new reactor designs to generate low-cost electricity, augment safety, and enhance fuel resource utilization for the energy-hungry developing world. In this context, I am happy that the secretariat in its draft Medium-Term Plan has proposed to devote attention to the development of small and medium-sized reactors and specialized reactors for desalination of water. This should be given the highest priority. Establishing the economic competitiveness of small and medium reactors would be of considerable relevance to the developing countries. Use

of thorium, which is as important a resource as uranium, also merits active consideration.”

Technology embargo

The other area of difficulty that Dr. Iyengar addressed, where the IAEA has seldom taken a separate stance from the nuclear weapons states, was the issue of “spin-offs.” Iyengar urged that “it is necessary to ensure that there is no interference in the internal policies of the member-states and no infringement of their fundamental right to carry out research and development, and thereby benefit from its spin-offs.” He insisted that emphasis of “special inspections,” or “what we may call as ‘challenge inspections’ beyond the provisions of existing documents, are bound to vitiate the atmosphere, for the simple reason that ‘challenge inspections’ by their very nature, presuppose acquisition by the agency of information through questionable means.”

Addressing the increasing difficulties faced by developing nations in obtaining essential technologies blocked by the powerful nuclear weapons states in cooperation with the IAEA, Dr. Iyengar cited the thin line that separates the “sensitive” technology from the “non-sensitive” variety. He pointed out that there is “a number of applications in which changing the ratio of isotope of naturally occurring non-fissile elements has significant advantages, such as nitride fuel in fast reactors and improving the efficiency of mercury vapor lamps.” He went on: “The dividing line between sensitive and non-sensitive technology is rather thin, and this essentially is the character of modern science and technology. To achieve its objective of promoting peaceful nuclear energy, the agency should ensure that no artificial barriers are raised to impede the development of high technologies.”

Dr. Iyengar also criticized the lack of an advisory scientific committee in the agency which he described as “a major lacuna which needs to be corrected.” In the 1960s and ’70s, the IAEA used to sponsor a number of international conferences to bring together scientists working in different areas of fundamental science. These interactions resulted in developing new areas of research, which often shaped the development of new technologies. “It is indeed unfortunate that in the recent past, there has been a dilution of these activities in preference to those that mainly deal with regulations, accounting, and safeguards,” Iyengar said. He urged the agency to “seek the advice of eminent international experts so that the activities of the agency are not reduced to merely carrying out tasks of a mundane nature.” Dr. Iyengar also cited the usefulness of the Regional Cooperative Agreement for promoting cooperation amongst developing countries. Urging the IAEA president to revitalize the practice, Dr. Iyengar said: “During the last year we [India] hosted regional training courses in research reactor safety and principles, and isotope techniques in hydrology. Three more programs and workshops are planned for 1991-92.”

High-handed U.S. memo outrages U.N. members

At the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York in July, the U.S. delegation, led by Amb. Thomas Pickering, surprised member states by delivering to each a memorandum entitled “United States priorities for the forty-sixth regular session of the United Nations General Assembly.” The document contained a litany of U.S. priorities for the session.

While reviewing section 6, it should be kept in mind that millions of children in Iraq are facing starvation because of the U.S.-instigated United Nations economic embargo.

In section 7, the United States particularly singled out for verbal abuse the U.N. Fourth Committee, and threatened to pull out of the committee. The Fourth Committee has been the particular forum which has heard complaints that U.S. statesman Lyndon LaRouche has been the victim of human rights violations, a judicial railroad, and political imprisonment. We excerpt from the document here to give readers a flavor of the U.S. attitude.

1. Arab-Israeli issues

The United States has in recent years looked closely at the U.N. resolution on U.N. cooperation with the Arab League with a view toward developing a consensus text. . . .

Unfortunately, we have been unable to vote in favor of this resolution whose concept we support, because some very contentious language remains in the text. At last year’s UNGA [United Nations General Assembly], progress was made in working to excise some of the most egregious language. But we could not support a text that still includes references to implementation of UNGA resolutions the USG [U.S. government] had vigorously opposed, as well as reference to the 1980 Amman summit report which specifically criticizes the United States. . . .

In our view this plethora of measures is excessive and does nothing to help the situation between Arabs and Israelis. It also consumes a considerable amount of General Assembly time and energy in a duplicative effort. We should think about consolidation of a number of these resolutions and, where possible, the elimination of contentious and gratuitous rhetoric. We want your views and support for such an effort. . . .

One final key issue: The 1975 UNGA Resolution 3379, the so-called “Zionism is Racism” resolution, continues to tarnish the U.N.’s respectability and its ability to play a responsible and unbiased role addressing Arab-Israeli issues. My government remains committed to the repeal of this reso-