Agenda Item 14: Report of IAEA

Statement by Hon'ble Mr. Balbir K. Punj, MP on November 6, 2000

Mr. President,

The Indian delegation has taken note of the Report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) presented by the Agency's Director General, Dr. Mohamed El Baradei. As a founder member of the Agency, India continues to play an active role in the work of the IAEA. We are particularly happy that the mechanism of the Scientific Forum, held to coincide with the annual General Conference of the IAEA, has now been institutionalized.

The Annual Report, in its overview, makes a reference to the Medium Term Strategy, which was developed in 1999 to form the basis for the formulation of programme proposals for the period 2001-2005. In this regard, India would like to emphasize that the IAEA was created with the main objective of accelerating and enlarging the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world. This is the central pillar on which the Agency should rest while giving due consideration to safeguard measures to prevent the use of Agency assistance for military purposes, and establish safety standards for protection of health and minimisation of danger to life and property. Safety and safeguards are indeed important and necessary supporting activities to enlarging and accelerating the contribution of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. However, they cannot become activities of the IAEA overshadowing the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Primacy must be accorded to technology. This is the only way we can faithfully interpret the time-tested Statute of the Agency.

Our delegation supports the priority assigned to the potential role of nuclear energy in sustainable development in the Medium Term Strategy which is in line with the recommendations of the Scientific Forum held during the 1999 General Conference of the IAEA. The Agency programme should include the Role of innovative Nuclear Reactors and Fuel Cycles for Sustainable Development. We appreciate the Director General's efforts in trying to establish a Task Force for this purpose. We feel strongly that it will be worthwhile for the Agency to support this programme as part of the regular programme of the Agency.

In the context of sustainability of nuclear power, it is appropriate for the Agency to address the issue of various nuclear fuel cycle options. A discussion by experts on the merits and problems of the close-fuel cycle versus the open-fuel cycle with its associated technical, financial and environmental aspects could form a meaningful part of the Medium Term Strategy. Necessitated by our limited uranium resources and in order to ensure long term energy security, India has opted for a closed nuclear fuel cycle policy, involving a fast breeder reactor programme and thorium utilization and associated fuel reprocessing and refabrication plants. A closed fuel cycle is also important for the safe management of the environment as it brings down the quantity of high level wastes to very low levels. Recognising the importance of the role of nuclear energy especially in developing countries, India, along with the Group of 77, has been requesting a "Nuclear Technology Review" on the lines of the nuclear safety review and to have it discussed as part of the dedicated agenda in the Board and in the General Conference. We are happy that the Director General has heeded our request and has also appointed Standing Advisory Groups for Nuclear Energy and Nuclear Science and Applications.

Even in countries which are currently witnessing a slowdown in their nuclear power development programme it is likely that a reversal would occur due to two factors – firstly, due to a

substantial increase in oil prices as is happening now and, secondly, due to their commitment to the Kyoto Protocol. For a large country like India, with its need to increase its per capita electricity consumption substantially, rapid growth in nuclear electricity generation capacity is of vital importance.

In India, our strong policy emphasis on nuclear power is on the operation of nuclear power plants in a safe and reliable manner. The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board of India stringently monitors all activities in this regard. It is a matter of satisfaction that since the last General Assembly, two more state-of-the-art, indigenously designed power reactor units have reached criticality – one unit at Kaiga, Karnataka and one unit at Rajasthan. Another reactor unit is due to reach criticality shortly. Construction work on the two indigenously designed 500 MW (e) Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor units at Tarapur is in full swing. The preparation of the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the construction of two 1000 MW(e) VVERs at Kudankulam in technical cooperation with Russia began in April 1999 and is expected to be completed next year. Site-related activities have already commenced.

The capabilities for providing the technology resources for our nuclear programme have been mainly derived from our strong R&D programme. India's efforts in developing the Advanced Heavy Water Reactor (AHWR), which will facilitate thorium utilization, is an effort toward developing innovative reactor and fuel cycle designs for sustainable development of nuclear energy. The growth in installed power generation capacity will, of course, continue with plants of state-of-the-art designs of thermal and fast reactors with emphasis on improved safety. In this context, we appreciate the initiative of President Putin announced in the recent UN Millennium Summit where he has recognised that the most rapid energy production growth will take place in the next century in the developing countries. He has also said that to diminish ecological degradation caused by greenhouse gases and to save global fossil reserves for non-electricity uses by the present and future generations there is the need to develop new nuclear technologies which are also proliferation resistant. IAEA with its comprehensive membership covering almost the entire world and, more importantly, the developing Member States, has the collective responsibility to find technological solutions to such problems. India on its part, as always, strongly supports these efforts and will actively participate in such initiatives.

Our R&D programme has continued to lay emphasis in areas such as medicine, agriculture and industry. Some work in these areas has also been taken up under the aegis of the Regional Cooperation Agreement (RCA) programme for Asia and the Pacific. As a founder member of the RCA, India is a strong supporter of the programme and has hosted several events including the meeting of the RCA national coordinators meeting early this year.

India has consistently supported the Technical Cooperation activities of the Agency and pays regularly and in full its annual contribution to the Technical Cooperation Fund (TCF). We are concerned that there is a widening gap between pledges and actual contributions and urge all Member States, especially the major donor countries, to similarly pledge and pay in full. Simultaneously, the Agency should orient its TC programmes in such a way as to promote self-reliance among developing countries rather than reliance on developed countries. We had called on the Agency to identify centres of excellence for human resources development under the Technical Cooperation for Developing Countries (TCDC) programme and had offered our training facilities to scientists and engineers from developing countries. In this regard, in a signal event this year, India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the IAEA for cooperation in connection with the Agency's regional and interregional training events, individual and group fellowships training programmes carried out as part of the Technical Cooperation activities of the IAEA. The MoU is an important milestone in our relationship with the IAEA and formalises our longstanding offer to make the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) a "centre of excellence/Regional Resource Unit (RRU)" under the Agency's Technical Cooperation for Developing Countries (TCDC) programme.

There is need to see an improvement in quality in the implementation of safeguards. Much has changed in technology since 1971 when the new inspection regime was put in place. This should be reflected in the quality and quantity of inspection efforts, with corresponding reductions in cost. The argument that increases in safeguards need to be accommodated automatically because these are mandatory requirements under agreements as required under the NPT brings into question the differences between statutory activities and mandatory activities. With promotion being the prime statutory aim of the IAEA, we wonder why only 5.9% of the IAEA budget goes for an important activity like nuclear power. On the other hand, there seems to be no holding back of resources for safeguards activities, with a call now for the extra budgetary contribution also to be incorporated into the regular budget. Such actions would further hurt promotional activities.

We reiterate our appreciation of the Agency's efforts in preventing illicit trafficking in nuclear materials. Yet, in our neighbourhood, clandestine acquisition of sensitive technology and materials is known to have occurred. Preventing this requires the commitment of Member States of the Agency. Both on the issue on physical protection measures and export controls, India follows a stringent, law-based system which is borne out by its exemplary record.

As we move into the new millennium it is time to pause, to rethink our strategies, and to examine our options. We need a fresh look at the importance of nuclear power, brushing aside the shroud of prejudices and apprehensions. Let us pool our collective wisdom and scientific knowledge and work together under the aegis of the IAEA to address the challenges of global development through deployment of nuclear technologies overcoming the barriers that come in the way. In this context, the Industry Forum organised by the Agency in January this year aimed at harmonizing and focusing promotional efforts being made by the private sector, governments and inter-governmental organisations in the field of nuclear power is a welcome step.