

International Atomic Energy Agency

IAEA Ministerial Conference on Nuclear Safety,
Vienna, 20 June 2011

Statement by Dr. S. Banerjee, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission

&

Leader of the Indian delegation

Distinguished President of the Conference,

Distinguished Director General,

Distinguished Delegates,

India joins other countries in expressing its deep condolences to the Japanese people for the sufferings in their country due to the natural disaster that struck them. India also takes this opportunity to convey its appreciation for the efforts of the Japanese people in dealing with the consequences of this tragedy. The accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan has raised world-wide concerns about the safety of nuclear energy.

Mr. President,

We convey our appreciation to Director General for the Agency's initiative to organize this timely global Conference on Nuclear Safety. While ensuring nuclear safety is a national responsibility it is imperative that member States join hands to strengthen IAEA and relevant international cooperation mechanisms to enhance public confidence in nuclear power generation. Nuclear safety is continuously evolving and the IAEA has a lead role in channeling global efforts in that direction.

Nuclear power is undoubtedly a clean source of energy, which can sustain global economic growth by meeting energy needs particularly in the developing world, while adequately addressing global warming and climate change concerns. The improved performance and enhanced safety features in nuclear power plants over the last two and half decades had contributed to a large extent for the public acceptance of the viability of nuclear power. Following the event in Japan, many countries including India, have expressed their commitment to further strengthen safety in nuclear power and reiterated their decision to pursue their planned nuclear programmes. Let us build on the lessons learnt from this accident to take nuclear safety to higher levels which can also take into account natural calamities of particularly large magnitudes.

Mr. President,

Nuclear energy remains an important element in India's energy basket for sustaining rapid economic growth. This will be pursued with full regard to the safety, livelihood and security of the people. India remains firmly committed to its three stage nuclear programme based on the closed fuel cycle. We have planned a major expansion of nuclear energy in the coming decades from the current level of 4780 MW- to reach a level of 20,000 MW by 2020 and a projected growth to about 60,000 MW in the early thirties.

We believe that nuclear safety should encompass the entire spectrum of activities, namely, siting, design, construction, commissioning, operation and periodic upgradation. We have focussed on defence in depth, diversity, redundancy and introduction of passive systems. We have also introduced some innovative measures at our nuclear plants based on our unique experiences. While our nuclear safety track record has been impeccable over 335 reactor years of operation, we recognize that there is no room for complacency. Our effort has been to achieve continuous improvement and innovation in nuclear safety with the basic principle being, 'safety first, production next.'

Mr. President,

As an immediate response to the Fukushima accident in March, Government of India instructed a thorough review of the safety of Indian nuclear power plants. The utility (NPCIL) and the regulatory body (AERB) have set up formal investigations. While detailed reviews are in progress, some immediate enhancement measures have already been identified for implementation.

The Prime Minister of India has recently underlined that safety of nuclear power plants is a matter of highest priority while implementing the national nuclear programme. Several decisions have been taken in this regard which include further strengthening of the regulatory system through necessary legislation, greater transparency, improved emergency response and preparedness, as well as inviting relevant IAEA peer review missions.

While recognizing that nuclear safety is a national responsibility, there is no doubt that much can be done to strengthen international cooperation in this area. As a first priority, existing mechanisms should be made full and better use of. In this regard the special meeting called by Contracting Parties to the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS) in August 2012 dedicated to Fukushima, is a step in the right direction. Subsequent meetings will no doubt build on the actions that get initiated next year. Further, the existing international peer review mechanisms contribute towards strengthening nuclear safety-organizations, processes and systems worldwide.

The Multinational Design Evaluation Programme (MDEP) of NEA is yet another important mechanism towards harmonised safety review of new nuclear power plants. Finally, IAEA safety standards constitute a powerful system which serves as the reference for safety requirements in many countries including India. We look forward to participation in updating these standards to incorporate the lessons from Fukushima.

Mr. President,

It must be recognized that the existing knowledge base with regard to nuclear safety science is rich and the Fukushima incident has in fact validated the scientific postulation of accident scenarios. Therefore, while we focus on legal and procedural aspects of nuclear safety, it is important that the scientific and technical issues of nuclear safety are given a higher priority in the implementation of national nuclear programmes by Member States. Knowledge and technology related to nuclear safety should move unrestrictedly across national boundaries, because the consequences of a major nuclear accident would be difficult to confine within national frontiers.

In this context, the IAEA should work towards the following:

- Enable national regulatory authorities and Technical Support Organizations which are involved in nuclear safety research to freely exchange knowledge and to have extensive collaborations.
- Facilitate access to utilities, without extraneous considerations, to the best nuclear safety technology and expertise that is available globally.
- Foster international cooperation in design of innovative reactor with inherent safety systems through INPRO programme.
- Undertake immediate review of the safety standards in the light of lessons from Fukushima events.

Mr. President,

This meeting should send a strong and unambiguous signal of support for nuclear energy while underlining our collective determination to take effective and timely steps to review and strengthen nuclear safety standards worldwide. We are confident that through our common vision and joint action, a reformed international nuclear safety architecture will emerge that will enhance public confidence in nuclear energy as a clean, affordable, safe and secure energy source vital to meeting global energy needs and aspirations of a better quality of life in the developing world.

Thank you.

