

Conference Report

43rd Annual General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Vienna, 27 September to 1 October 1999.

In September 1999, representatives from 119 Member States met in Vienna for a week for considering a range of topics on the peaceful development of nuclear technologies, eg, IAEA programmes on Nuclear Safety, Technical Cooperation, Safeguards, Measures against illicit trafficking in nuclear materials, etc. The delegates elected Dr Abderrahmane Kadri of Algeria as the President of the Conference. The Indian delegation was led by Dr R Chidambaram, Chairman of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission. In his statement, he said that India aimed at attaining 20,000 MWe of nuclear power by 2020. In the coming century nuclear energy would account for an increasing share of electricity generated in India. He also said that nuclear power generation, stagnating in Europe and North America, was growing fast in Asia, which viewed it as an inevitable energy option.

Parallel to the General Debate a Scientific Forum was held where distinguished speakers took part. The Forum addressed various issues of a scientific and technical nature that have a direct bearing on the

The IAEA, a specialized agency within the UN system, was founded in Vienna in 1957 as a forum for technical cooperation in the nuclear field and for applying nuclear safeguards to states voluntarily submitting their civil nuclear facilities to inspection. At present the secretariat of IAEA has, under the Egyptian Director General Dr Mohamed El Baradel, 931 staff members in the professional and 1290 in the general service category, including consultants and cost-free experts. Ninetynine nationalities are represented in the posts subject to geographical distribution.

There are at present 14 professional and 53 general service staff from India, in addition to several other people of Indian origin.

The Member States, now 131 in number, through the General Conference and a Board of Governors, control the policy and activities of the IAEA. The annual budget of IAEA amounts to about 300 million dollars.

Agency's programme of activities and discussed new trends in nuclear matters which are of relevance to Member States. This year's Scientific Forum was organized to discuss the role of nuclear power in a sustainable development. It was felt that the Agency should provide objective and impartial information to policy makers in various Member States about the strengths and weaknesses of nuclear power vis-a-vis other available energy options in meeting future energy requirements in different world regions. This appeared to be particularly useful in the present context when Member States seemed to be aligned along two opposing camps: pro and anti nuclear power. Some of the topics covered in the two-day Forum were the following:

- * Nuclear Power in the World Energy Outlook
- * Sustainable Energy Development
- * Global Development and Nuclear Power in the 21st Century
- * Comparing Alternative Electricity-Generating Options
- * Nuclear Waste and Energy Sustainability

- * Role of Nuclear Power in OECD countries, Developing Countries and in Transition Economics

The Scientific Forum ended with a panel discussion on 'Nuclear Power in the Energy-Environment Policy Debate and the Role of International Cooperation'. The 12-member panel discussed four areas for international cooperation; technical and institutional infrastructure, public acceptance, radioactive wastes and new reactors and applications. For many panellists, the plateauing of the nuclear industry was seen to be the result of the prevailing public opinion against nuclear power. They said that the IAEA could provide credible information on the lower greenhouse gas emission potential of nuclear energy. The panellists agreed that a decision on waste disposal must be made, regardless of the future of nuclear energy, because the waste was already accumulating.

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5 October, 1999

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[Those interested in applying for a post in the IAEA, may use the internet website
<http://www.iaea.or.at/worldatom/vacancies>
which gives the available vacancies, terms of employment and method of applying.]
