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India and the 2014 Nuclear Security Summit

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RESHMI KAZI, MAR 24 2014

On March 24th-25th, fifty-three nations and four international organizations will gather in the Hague for the Nuclear Security Summit to discuss measures to combat and reduce the threat of nuclear terrorism. The Hague Summit, being the third edition of the ongoing Nuclear Security Summits held since 2010, is a reiteration of the global commitment to minimize the risk of weapons-usable nuclear materials from falling into wrong hands. Protection of the existing global stockpiles of nuclear materials is a colossal task. However, what is more challenging is to sustain, and increase, the standards of nuclear security. India is acutely cognizant of the above outlined task and has so far undertaken exemplary measures to uphold its responsibilities. Despite so, the *Nuclear Threat Initiative's Nuclear Materials Security Index* has ranked India 23rd out of 25 countries with weapons-usable nuclear materials. Though India has a commendable nuclear security record, it might expectedly face criticisms from a concerned global community due to a number of factors at the Hague Summit. How is India to dispel these doubts and assure the international community that its nuclear security is of a world-class standard?

The *Nuclear Materials Security Index* report criticized India on the grounds that it has not invited a peer review of its nuclear security arrangements. To put records straight, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited NPCIL, which is a member of World Association of Nuclear Operators (WANO), has undertaken progressive WANO peer review of the nuclear power plants. WANO members visited Kaiga Atomic Power Station from February 3rd-6th 2010. Similarly, other teams of WANO members visited Tarapur and Kudankulam Power Projects. Tarapur has undergone two WANO peer reviews and conducted two WANO technical support missions. These visits were part of technical tours organized with the objective of information and experiences in order to maximize the operational safety of power plants; ensure the reliability of performance levels of nuclear power plants; and encourage communication by exchanging vital inputs to learn the challenges and best practices in nuclear power generation. This was done in line with the ultimate goal of enhancing safety performance and the operational practices of nuclear power stations in India.

In November 2012, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) led Operational Safety Review Team (OSART) conducted a review of safety practices at the Rajasthan Atomic Power Station (APS) in Rawatbhata, Units 3 and 4. During the in-depth operational safety review of the nuclear power plants, the team identified several good practices of the plant. As a follow-up to this review process, in February 2014, the OSART further re-evaluated the Rajasthan APS, Units 3 and 4 and found that the Rajasthan APS operators had satisfactorily implemented the recommendations made in 2012. The team noted significant progress in the condition of cable trays, power and control cables, higher fire doors standard and an enhanced surveillance-testing programme to assure the functionality of testing systems.

India has never shied away from peer review processes of its nuclear power plants. India has consistently supported assessment of its nuclear power plants by the highest international inspection teams led by the IAEA to assure the international community that its nuclear safety standards are in line with international standards.

NTI criticism against India for not having an established Centre of Excellence now stands invalid. India has established the Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP) at Haryana which was announced by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the Washington Summit in 2010. The Centre will have five schools to promote safe, secure and sustainable nuclear energy including nuclear security and non-proliferation through global partnership.

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The GCNEP is expected to have a long-term impact on nuclear security and technology development in India.

A third criticism leveled against India is that it lacks an independent nuclear regulatory agency, a commitment made by India at the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit. India is cognizant of the need to establish an independent regulatory mechanism to ensure effective oversight. Post Mayapuri, the 2010 incident in New Delhi, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) recommended that the proposed nuclear safety regulator should be made more autonomous to enthruse public confidence. The parliamentary panel expressed optimism that the Nuclear Safety Regulatory Authority (NSRA) bill introduced in the Lok Sabha will establish a body to enact a set of appropriate, comprehensive and sound regulations.

Additionally, India must assure the international community about its closed nuclear fuel-cycle, which is essentially proliferation-resistant, and ensure security of its nuclear materials. India has an effective transportation system with effective tracking mechanism closely monitored by a dedicated Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) cadre. There are escorts in between jeeps carrying nuclear materials who have radio contact with both each other and the headquarters. Only the commander schedules the movement of fissile materials and the local police are pre-informed during such transportation.

Arguably, the onus of nuclear security is not contained within the national boundaries of any one state possessing nuclear capability as the implications of a nuclear catastrophe pose international implications. India's nuclear security nexus operates in a distinctive historical and geopolitical space. As part of Asia that witnessed the twin atomic explosions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as the originator and operative base of the AQ Khan nuclear black market, and located in the centre of expanding nuclear energy with 47 power reactors under construction and a further 120 already in operation, India must play a crucial role in the Hague summit to assure the world that India's nuclear security and safety is dealt with by a responsible nation.

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