

Is Nuclear Disarmament Desirable and Feasible?

The National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) at Bengaluru witnessed a well thought out debate on the topic of desirability and feasibility of nuclear disarmament, as a group of young researchers and students debated the issue. Presenting hard hitting arguments with statistics and sound reasoning, the participants put in reasoned arguments for and against nuclear disarmament. One group noted that despite 70 years since the first nuclear bomb, there has not been enough clarity and consensus globally on the subject of disarmament. Another group pointed out that even if countries gave up nuclear weapons, there were no appropriate mechanisms for verifying disarmament, therefore raising doubts about the sustainability of a nuclear weapons free world.

This discussion took place as a part of the programme on Global Nuclear Politics and Strategy: Fifth Annual Residential Workshop for Young Scholars that was organised jointly by Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi and NIAS, Bengaluru at the NIAS campus between 4th – 7th May 2015. NIAS and IPCS had called for applications prior to the Workshop. In response, over 75 applications were received out of which 30 participants were selected. The participants from different parts of the country included students, research scholars, practitioners, officers from the defence forces and policy makers. There was also one foreign participant from Australia.

The programme saw an impressive line-up of speakers, who gave lectures on diverse topics pertinent to nuclear safety and security, nuclear deterrence, nuclear strategies and capabilities of India, China and Pakistan. The speakers included Dr D Suba Chandran, Prof S Chandrashekar, Amb Arundhati Ghose, Dr LV Krishnan, Prof RajaramNagappa, Prof R Rajaraman, Prof N Ramani, Prof Varun Sahni, Dr.ManpreetSethi, Vice Adm (Retd) Vijay Shankar, AmbSheel Kant Sharma, Dr AR Sundararajan, Prof LalithaSundaresan, and Dr ArunVishwanathan.

A key highlight of the event was that now such policy discourses are taking place “out of the New Delhi circuit”, said Dr ArunVishwanathan from NIAS, one of organisers. Dr Gaurav, a participant of the workshop, echoed the sentiment, saying that people from across the country do have views on such topics and it is critical to engage in such discourses across the country.

On the last day of the workshop, a Special Lecture was delivered by Dr Baldev Raj, Director, NIAS on the “Nuclear Energy after Major Accidents”. During the talk, Dr Baldev Raj stressed on the importance of energy security for the nation and its development in a sustainable manner. Arguing on the positives of nuclear energy, Dr Baldev Raj said, “With diminishing coal reserves and its impact on the environment and the planet at large, one is not left with much choice but to rely on renewables and nuclear power”.

Talking about the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, Dr Baldev Raj pointed out that there was one more nuclear power plant at Onagawa, about 100 km away from Fukushima, and located closer to the epicenter of the March 2011 earthquake which did not suffer any damage. Apparently, the safety standards and precautions taken at Onagawa were far superior. He observed that it was clear that if proper safety measures and precautions are practised nuclear plants safety will not be compromised due to natural calamities. He emphasised that it is important for the Indian establishment not to be complacent for a moment and build redundancy into systems for safety.

The event came to a close with valedictory address by Vice Admiral (Retd) RN Ganesh, former Director General, Advanced Technology Vessel Project and Adjunct Faculty, NIAS. V.Adm Ganesh stated that the Indian policy of No-First Use (NFU) of nuclear weapons is a stabilising factor. Speaking of nuclear deterrence, he stated that is an area with a million shades of grey and ambiguity

is integral with it. Further, he stated it was not contradictory for India to possess nuclear weapons and maintain belief in nuclear disarmament which is essentially a long term goal.

The Workshop ended with the hope that such events are held more regularly and a network is built amongst the workshop alumni to foster discussion and debate on national security issues.

Workshop on *Global Nuclear Politics and Strategy Fifth Annual Residential Workshop for Young Scholars* held during 4-7 May 2015 at NIAS, Bangalore, Organised by Institute of Peace of Conflict Studies (IPCS), New Delhi & NIAS.