

## From New Delhi by Susan Maitra and Ramtanu Maitra

### The Blix factor

*Behind the facade of an amiable old man, the IAEA chief turned out to be a State Department tough.*

**I**nternational Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Dr. Hans Blix's surprise "private" visit to India, which somehow happened to coincide with U.S. Undersecretary of State for Internal Security Reginald Bartholomew's scheduled visit to India to pressure the country to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), turned out to be nothing short of a spectacle. Although in an official press conference, newsmen had a lot of fun grilling Dr. Blix, who tried furtively to evade questions about the purpose of his visit, it is evident that the IAEA chief was working in tandem with the U.S. State Department.

Dr. Blix claimed officially that his brother-in-law is the Swedish ambassador to India and that his visit was tantamount to a family reunion. Few believed him. Elsewhere, he had openly admitted that he had indeed come to India to suggest that India sign the NPT, the stated purpose of the Bartholomew visit.

There are other reasons to be suspicious of Dr. Blix's simple explanation. Just before his arrival, Dr. Blix had been trying to push through a proposal to set up a special nuclear intelligence unit directly under him within the IAEA. In the process, Dr. Blix wanted to bypass the safeguards department, which has a deputy director general. India and others strongly opposed the move, and the proposal was killed for the time being. But there was no doubt in anyone's mind on whose behalf Dr. Blix was acting.

Dr. Blix, though well aware of the "stiff opposition" offered by India to

his barely concealed effort to set up the path for legitimizing "challenge inspections," continued his campaign with missionary zeal. He regaled the Indian media with the agency's experience in Iraq, where "our confidence in the existing measures, which is based on voluntary declaration of all nuclear installations by an NPT signatory, was misplaced." At least one Indian analyst pointed out that if Dr. Blix had shown similar concern for the spread of nuclear energy to facilitate development in developing countries, he, perhaps, could be more effective.

The concerns that the IAEA chief expressed here were identical to the ones that Washington often expresses. For instance, Dr. Blix made it clear that he is not happy with the fact that a number of Indian nuclear reactors are not under full safeguards. This is true, since India is a non-signatory of the NPT and these reactors were developed indigenously. The U.S.-supplied reactors at Tarapur and the Canadian reactor at Kota are under full safeguards. Finding more resistance on this issue, Blix took a clever tact. He suggested that India receive more technical assistance from the IAEA.

The reduction in technical assistance occurred in 1974 when India exploded a nuclear device, which India insists was used to develop peaceful nuclear explosives meant for expediting earth excavation. According to analysts, there is a feeling among top IAEA officials that the reduced level of technical assistance has led to a loss of leverage vis-à-vis India.

However, Blix's ploy was also abortive. He himself admitted that Indian officials have indicated that India would reject any offer of assistance from the IAEA if it entails imposing international safeguards on the indigenously developed Indian reactors.

There were also reports that both Bartholomew and Blix had raised the vexing issue of the proposed sale of a 10-megawatt research reactor to Teheran with Indian officials. The Indians were in no mood to discuss this issue since they had made it clear that the bogey of nuclear proliferation raised by the State Department is pure bunkum. If and when India sells the research reactor, it will be done under a tripartite agreement involving the IAEA and would ensure full safeguards. This statement had been issued at least a week before Dr. Blix's visit by Indian Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Dr. P.K. Iyengar.

If that was not enough, Blix put both his feet in his mouth on the NPT issue. At a press conference, Indian newsmen seemed genuinely puzzled to hear Dr. Blix's sincere advocacy of India's signing the NPT. They pointed out that a few minutes back, Dr. Blix had himself asserted, citing the case of Iraq, that signing the NPT itself does not prevent proliferation. Dr. Blix glibly retorted saying he was promoting the signing of the NPT because it is the "golden road to non-proliferation." When a newsman pointed that the NPT has not stopped proliferation, Dr. Blix, looking a bit flustered, said: "Well, I take back my words. It is not a golden but a broad road to non-proliferation."

Indian Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Dr. Iyengar, who was sitting next to him on the dais, interjected, saying, "NPT is not meant to stop big powers from proliferating. It is only intended to stop developing countries from making crude bombs."