

INSIGHTS

INSIGHTS CURRENT EVENTS OCTOBER-18

<http://insightsonindia.com>

Team Insights

2013

NATIONAL**AERB's functioning comes under scrutiny: Public Accounts Committee (PAC)**

- In the backdrop of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB's) blatant weaknesses, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has adopted a report on the "Activities of Atomic Energy Regulatory Board".
- Earlier too the Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG) in its 'performance audit' had mentioned about the AERB's weakness.
- Following which the PAC has recommended making the mechanism stronger, more independent and empowered. The below observations & recommendations were made by PAC:
- AERB does not have an independent legal status, it remains a mere subordinate authority with powers delegated to it by the Centre. AERB's dependence on the DAE (Department of Atomic Energy) for budgetary and administrative support circumscribes its independence.
- There is no fixed term of office for the Chairman of AERB. There is "conflict of interest" with the AERB chairman reporting to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) Chairman, who is also Secretary, DAE, all these aspects curbed the regulatory mechanism's independence.
- Licensing and even the renewal process for even high radiation potential hazard units have been unsatisfactory.
- Henceforth there is a need for an 'independent and autonomous regulator'. In line with this, the following 3 functions should be performed by AERB:
 - enacting 'appropriate, comprehensive, sound regulations'
 - verifying 'compliance with such regulations'
 - enforcing established regulations by imposing appropriate corrective measures.
- AERB has failed to develop "safety policy, standards, codes and guides." It does not have any authority for framing rules relating to nuclear and radiation safety. So it would be appropriate that DAE takes necessary steps to "review and scrutinize" all the existing rules. It has recommended that the proposed law should contain a 'sound provision to act as an effective deterrent against violators'.
- Since absence of such a policy could hamper "micro-level planning" of radiation safety, the PAC has recommended that a "safety policy document be brought out expeditiously." It also reiterated the imperative to set minimum benchmarks and safeguards to provide full assurance for safety in nuclear and radiation facilities
- Its human resources are limited. The snail-like approach of AERB in bringing radiation users under regulatory control has indicated lack of manpower. A substantial number of radiation facilities, including 91% of the medical X-ray units in India, operated outside its ambit. Only 5,270 out of 57,443 X-ray units were registered, and

as there were only 300 engineers and scientists, it was impossible to regulate all the machines. Hence PAC has suggested capacity-building and augmenting human resources.

- AERB's emergency preparedness is "inadequate". PAC has recommended that the AERB has to strengthen the "regulating aspect of emergency preparedness."
- AERB has been "slow in adopting international benchmarks and good practices" in nuclear and radiation operation. Hence peer review and appraisal services of the International Atomic Energy Agency would go a long way in making the nuclear regulatory infrastructure effective, sustainable, and more credible.

What is AERB? It Mission?

- The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board was constituted on November 15, 1983 by the President of India by exercising the powers conferred by the Atomic Energy Act to carry out certain regulatory and safety functions under the Act. The regulatory authority of AERB is derived from the rules and notifications promulgated under the Atomic Energy Act and the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

Mission:

- The mission of the Board is to ensure that the use of ionizing radiation and nuclear energy in India does not cause undue risk to health and the environment.

Source AERB Government website

More about Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

- The PAC is a committee of selected members of Parliament, constituted by the Parliament of India, for the auditing of the expenditure of the Government of India.
- The PAC is formed every year with a strength of not more than 22 members of which 15 are from Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Parliament, and 7 from Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Parliament. The term of office of the members is one year. None of the 22 members shall be a minister in the government.
- The Chairman is appointed by the Speaker of Lok Sabha.
- Since 1967, the chairman of the committee is selected from the opposition. Earlier, it was headed by a member of the ruling party. Its chief function is to examine the audit report of Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) after it is laid in the Parliament. CAG assists the committee during the course of investigation.
- The PAC was in news in 2011 when it probed the 2G spectrum scam.

Source Wikipedia

INTERNATIONAL

India questions U.S. control over critical Net resources

- India has questioned the control of U.S. contracted entities over critical Internet resources like allocation of domain names and pointed out that the current system needed to be renewed to make the global Internet governance regime truly “multilateral, transparent and democratic.”
- The existing system is not reflective or truly representative of the international character or community of Internet users. The equal opportunity and assured access requires equitable distribution of resources and representative management of the Internet not only in the national sphere but also at the global level.
- In the absence of an integrated and holistic global policy, States were adopting diverse and often contradictory national policies on new and emerging issues such as net neutrality, social networking sites, search engines, role of Internet intermediaries and cyber-terrorism.
- Since India is committed to protecting, preserving and safeguarding freedom of expression and Internet freedom and to strengthening them, it wants all the stakeholders to be involved in its global governance.
- Every step taken by India to enhance cyber security is conditioned by the commitment to its liberal democratic principles enshrined in the Constitution and as well as ensuring safety and security of its citizens which is the primary duty of any government
- Under the existing institutional architecture for Internet governance, the International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) performed two functions – the Internet Assigned Names Authority (IANA), whereby it controlled entries to the authoritative Root Zone File of the Internet, and secondly the management of the Domain Name System (DNS), including the allocation of Top Level Domain (TLD) names.

NSA surveillance supported drone strikes

- The continuing exposes on the U.S. National Security Agency’s (NSA) clandestine surveillance programmes has raised alarm among civil liberties groups and human rights activists.
- According to a recent report, the NSA’s surveillance program has been used for “targeted killing” using drone strikes.
- Earlier in 2012, the NSA’s eavesdropping on e-mails had led to the killing of Hassan Ghul, an al-Qaeda associate who provided ‘a critical piece of intelligence’ that had helped the CIA find Osama bin Laden, in a drone strike in Pakistan’s tribal belt.

India-China: Border issues



- In the next meet between India and China, the two countries are looking forward to sign the Border Defence Co-operation Agreement (BDCA).
- The BDCA is expected to provide an additional mechanism to deal with problems at the LAC (Line of Actual Control), in addition to the 2005 Peace and Tranquility agreement.
- This is in line with the confidence building measure (CBM) that both the countries had agreed upon in the 2005 Peace pact.
- On the hydro-project front, India wants a joint mechanism that will ensure more transparency on Chinese plans on proposed dam projects on the river Brahmaputra. During the Chinese premier’s visit to India in May, 2013 the two countries had agreed on sharing of the hydrological data under a renewed agreement.

More about the Border Issues & LAC

- The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the effective border between India and the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The LAC is 4,057-km long and traverses three areas of northern Indian states: western (Ladakh, Kashmir), middle (Uttarakhand, Himachal) and eastern (Sikkim, Arunachal).
- The LAC consists of McMahon Line in the east and the line up to which each side exercises actual control in the west (the Aksai Chin region)
- The term "LAC" gained legal recognition in Sino-Indian agreements signed in 1993 and 1996. The 1996 agreement states, "No activities of either side shall overstep the line of actual control." However, the Indian government claims that Chinese troops continue to illegally enter the area hundreds of times every year.

- Recent violations: In 2013 there was a three week standoff between Indian and Chinese troops 30 km southeast of Daulat Beg Oldi. It was resolved and both Chinese and Indian troops withdrew in exchange for an Indian agreement to destroy some military structures over 250 km to the south near Chumar that the Chinese perceived as threatening.

Source Wikipedia

India-Russia meet: focus on nuclear liability issue

- In the next annual summit (in Moscow, 20- 22nd October, 2013) between India and Russia the main focus would be on nuclear liability issue.
- There have been differences between the two countries over the 'liability clauses' ever since the India's Nuclear liability Act, 2010 came into existence.
- Russia has insisted that the 2010 law should not apply to its supply of Kudankulam reactors 3 and 4, since the agreement to supply Kudankulam-1 and 2 was made before the Indian liability law came into existence and hence reactors 3 & 4 should be treated as an extension of the same project.
- India's point of view is that the "right to recourse" is not automatic. Since the role of the supplier in any accident has to be proved, there is enough room in the law to ensure supplier liability does not become a major hurdle.
- Apart from nuclear energy, other issues like political, strategic, trade and military issues would also be discussed.

Russia pushes for a competitive environment between West, Iran

- Following the conclusion of two-day talks between Iran and the six global powers (U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany) Russia has proposed a nuclear deal with Iran, on condition that Tehran agrees to put all its atomic installations under international supervision.
- For this to happen the 'unilateral sanctions' must be removed.
- In the backdrop of its 'West Asia policy', Russia is set to play a leading diplomatic role in resolving the enduring crisis in Iran.
- According to Russia, if any deal has to materialise, it must allow Iran to carry out uranium enrichment, permitted by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which Tehran has signed.
- This would be a major step in normalizing Iran's ties with the West, which has been strained for decades.
- Iran would now be willing to limit nuclear enrichment to 5%, which is necessary to start off atomic power plants, which Tehran is planning to establish.
- The strain in the relationship between Iran and the West was due to :
- Iran's successful enrichment of uranium to a 20% level which was apprehended that if it managed to enrich to a

90% level, Iran would be on the verge of developing an atomic bomb and

- Low level of trust between Iran and the six global powers was another setback to the smooth progression of a dialogue.

All you need to know about NPT:

- The NPT is a landmark international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament.
- The Treaty represents the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to the goal of disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States. Opened for signature in 1968, the Treaty entered into force in 1970.
- A total of 190 parties have joined the Treaty, including the five nuclear-weapon States (United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China (also the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council). Though North Korea acceded to the NPT in 1985 but never came into compliance, announced its withdrawal in 2003.
- Four other states are known or believed to possess nuclear weapons: India, Pakistan and North Korea have openly tested and declared that they possess nuclear weapons, while Israel has had a policy of opacity regarding its own nuclear weapons program.
- The 3 pillars of NPT
 - non-proliferation,
 - disarmament, and
 - the right to peacefully use nuclear technology

- To further the goal of non-proliferation and as a confidence-building measure between States parties, the Treaty establishes a safeguards system under the responsibility of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Safeguards are used to verify compliance with the Treaty through inspections conducted by the IAEA. The Treaty promotes cooperation in the field of peaceful nuclear technology and equal access to this technology for all States parties, while safeguards prevent the diversion of fissile material for weapons use.

Source UN website & Wikipedia

ECONOMICS

India for settling Nuclear supplier liability fears via insurance package

- The new insurance package which the public sector General Insurance Corporation (GIC) is working on would help address the concerns of suppliers and operators over India's 2010 law on liability.

- In the proposal, part of the process involves drawing up premium rates for specific parts of a power reactor so that the actuarial burden of any direct or indirect liability in the event of an accident can be quantified in advance and factored into any price negotiations between the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) and its Russian, U.S. and French suppliers.
- This would allay Russian concerns over the Civil Liability clauses in the coming annual summit (20-22nd October) between India & Russia

Chinese firms to set up power gear units in India

- The Union Cabinet has approved a proposal following which China would now be able to setup power equipment service centres in India.
- According to the memorandum of understanding (MoU), which would be signed in the PM's next visit to China, India would allow entry of Chinese companies in not only setting up power equipment servicing centres but also equipment manufacturing facilities in India, catering to a number of power projects which are in the process of purchasing power equipment from China or already have that equipment.
- In 2010, Reliance Power and Shanghai Electric Corporation had signed a \$10-billion deal for sourcing equipment for the Indian company's projects to be set up in 10 years.
- However, from the close quarters, there has been a demand for higher import duty on power gear, which at present attracts 21%.