

# 2012 Global Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul: Views from India

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The Global Nuclear Security Summit is scheduled to be held on March 26-27, 2012 in South Korea. The summit is expected to spotlight the danger of terrorists acquiring and using nuclear weapons. When delegates from 49 nations convened on January 16-17 in New Delhi to work on the agenda for the forthcoming summit, Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai said that “the main objective of the nuclear summit process has been to focus high-level global attention on the threat posed by nuclear terrorism.” He further said that “security of nuclear materials is fundamentally a national responsibility but there is considerable scope for international cooperation to strengthen nuclear security objectives and standards.”

Indeed, security of nuclear materials is fundamentally a national responsibility, but there is considerable scope for international cooperation to strengthen nuclear security as well as combating illicit trafficking. The preparatory meeting of the forum held in New Delhi was led by the US and South Korea. It focused principally on reaching agreement on a preliminary document that would be approved by participating nations at the Seoul Summit.

It may be recalled that in April 2010, 47 heads of states and 3 heads of international organizations, the UN, IAEA, and EU, met at the inaugural Nuclear Security Summit held in Washington D.C. to highlight nuclear terrorism as one of the most challenging threats to international security and pledged to take strong nuclear security measures to protect humanity, society and the environment. In April 2009, US President Barack Obama delivered a speech in Prague, urging the world to come together to prevent nuclear terrorism and announced “a new international effort to secure all vulnerable

nuclear materials around the world within four years.” Accordingly, the summit was held in Washington in April 2010. It was the highest-level forum focusing on the common objective of preventing nuclear terrorism, which is one of the greatest threats to international security in the 21st century.

The international forum held in New Delhi in January was intended to firm up the agenda for the Seoul Global Nuclear Summit. The forum of so-called “sherpas” had representatives from 46 nations, the IAEA, the UN, the EU and Interpol. It was the fourth in a series of preparatory meetings for the high-profile March summit. The earlier preparatory meetings were held in Seoul, Helsinki and Buenos Aires. India was the first developing country to host the meeting. The goal of the New Delhi meeting was to finalise the strategy that is expected to be approved at the Seoul Summit for securing all of the world’s vulnerable atomic materials against potential acquisition by terrorist organizations. India is concerned over nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terror groups in Pakistan, and particularly about the role of the guardians who guard the country’s arsenal.

Many countries represented at the meeting agreed “in principle” to minimize their use of weapon-usable highly enriched uranium (HEU) for civilian applications and not for military use as the material can be used to fuel nuclear weapons. The agreement on HEU material would be incorporated into the “Seoul Communique” the final document that nations taking part in the summit are expected to adopt.

One of the central issues to be covered at the event in Seoul would be how to safeguard radioactive sources around the world from potential diversion by extremists seeking to produce an improved nuclear weapon. Additional agenda issues would include “practical and concrete” options for minimizing the danger of a nuclear terrorist attack and preventing nuclear weapon crises like that at Japan’s Fukushima Daiichi facility.

In the meantime, a release from the University of Texas at Austin’s Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Project in January 2012 mentioned that a large group of US non-proliferation, medical and health specialists called on US lawmakers to curb use of medical isotopes produced from Russian weapon-ready uranium and to entirely prohibit their employment no later than 2017. The group of experts in their letter said that Russia was quickly increasing its utilization of bomb-grade uranium to produce the medical isotope molybdenum 99 in order to gain supremacy over isotope sales in the US medical sector. This organization argues that such an effort goes counter to US moves to heighten its manufacturing of medical isotopes through reactors that do not use highly enriched uranium. It is argued, therefore, that Moscow’s program could also raise the threat of nuclear terrorism.

The specialists requested that lawmakers modify legislation approved in November 2011 by the Senate—The American Medical Isotopes Production Act—to mandate “preferential procurement” of isotopes that are not generated from weapon-usable uranium.

In his greetings, President Lee Myung-bak of the Republic of Korea noted that the work of preventing nuclear terrorism and guarding against other nuclear threats is a difficult challenge and therefore steadfast political determination and international cooperation can yield significant progress. As the Summit Chair, South Korea is expected to do everything possible to help define a vision for greater international nuclear security and to formulate specific work plans that will put that vision to practice. The Seoul Summit is not only expected to produce tangible results in building a more secure and peaceful world but would highlight the benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in promoting green growth and a more prosperous world.

As the host country, South Korea would be concerned that the Summit will have implications for North Korea, though the international gathering is not expected to specifically take up the issue of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons development. Though deterring terrorists from acquiring and using nuclear materials is the main objective of the Seoul Summit, South Korea also does not plan to officially discuss Iranian and North Korean issues at the summit. However, the summit itself may send a message to North Korea.

The Stalinist state is viewed as a top proliferator of missiles and other armaments and suspected of conducting nuclear collaboration with nations such as Syria. South Korea does not expect the new North Korean leader Kim Jong-un would substantially his father's policies on nuclear weapons. Kim Jong-il, who died in December 2011, saw nuclear arms as his regime's insurance policy against a possible invasion by South Korea and the US, and as a crucial tool for securing economic and security concessions from the international community. This policy is unlikely to change under the new regime.

As the host of the March summit, Seoul will have to choose a successor to chair the next summit. Netherlands has agreed to host the third nuclear security summit in 2014. The Netherland's central location in Europe makes it an attractive choice. The formal naming of the Netherlands as the 2014 host is likely to occur during the Seoul session. It is commendable that global efforts would contribute to make the world a better, safer and more secure place than before.

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