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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : **NO Amcongen BOMBAY** **239** **484**
DESP. NO.

TO : **THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.**

REF : **Bombay D-400, 1/6/61 and D-444, 1/30/61; New D-**

ACTION	DEPT.
For Dept. S/AE-4	IN R/W/K-2 Rip-1 INK-7 KA-4 E-7 ICA-11 EUC-5.
Use Only 3/4	REC'D OTHER D-9 SBA-2
	OCIA-10 REC-9 OSU 5 (Army-4 Navy-4 Air-6)

SUBJECT: **Possible Indian Desire for Nuclear Weapons Development**
Con-10 ILSF-4 NSH 4
New Delhi-2 Calcutta-1 Madras-1 Karachi-1
London-1 (Security) USIA-10

Yes, India could produce a nuclear weapon in two years or so if it wanted to; but it has no intention of doing so. That, in essence, is the comment of two leading Indian atomic energy officials on the statement made to the press in New Delhi on February 2, 1961 by their chief, Dr. Homi J. BHABHA, Chairman of the Indian Atomic Energy Commission (see New Delhi D-775).

In a conversation with the reporting officer last week, Mr. H. N. SETHNA, Head of the Chemical Group of the Atomic Energy Establishment (AEE) at Trombay, asserted that any country with some industrial base -- the UAR, for example -- could produce a nuclear device within a period of about five years. India, he said, could of course do the job in a much shorter time inasmuch as it already has an operating atomic establishment. But the fact is, added Sethna, India is not interested in producing a nuclear weapon. Aside from the foreign policy questions involved, on which India's position is well known, India, if it wanted nuclear weapons, would have to marshal all its efforts in the field of atomic energy toward that one end. It clearly is not doing so, said Sethna.

For example, Sethna pointed out, the proposed 300 MW atomic power plant at Tarapur will be run to produce energy on a commercial basis. Economic operation of the plant will require that the natural uranium fuel -- assuming for this point that the fuel will in fact be natural uranium -- have a burnup of some 3,000 megawatt-days (MWD) per ton. The plutonium produced in this operation would have too much Pu 240 and would not be desirable for weapons production. If India wanted to obtain weapons-grade plutonium, the average burnup of uranium fuel should not exceed 600-800 MWD/ton; this would triple the cost of producing energy from the power plant and is simply out of the question, Sethna said.

Nor does India have any plan to use the two grams or so of plutonium which have been generated to date from the operation of the Canada-India Reactor at Trombay, according to Sethna.

Furthermore, Sethna said, if India wanted to go ahead with nuclear weapons development it would be impossible to maintain the necessary secrecy. Numbers of foreigners (from Asia and Africa, and even from Hungary) have undergone training at AEE Trombay and others will follow. The Head of the Radiochemistry Division

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AE Developments - INDIA

Handwritten initials and notes:
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(G. A. Welch) and the Head of the Isotope Division (C. Taylor) of the AEE are British nationals. So is E. C. Allardice, Controller of the AEE. Several Canadians have been connected with the operation of the Canada-India Reactor. It would not be possible to keep these foreigners from learning of any efforts in the direction of weapons development.

In another recent conversation with the reporting officer Mr. M. N. CHAKRAVARTI, head of the Tarapur power project, deplored Bhabha's statement concerning India's ability to produce a nuclear weapon. Such a statement was merely indulging in bravado, and India could well do without it. Chakravarti also decried as "political" the references by Bhabha, in his recent press conference, to India's need for a first generation of natural-uranium power stations and to India's opposition to safeguards. Such statements, said Chakravarti, tended to place needless obstacles in the way of his own job: to get the Tarapur plant built and into efficient operation.

Comment: Sethna's remarks are of interest since he is the leading scientific figure on the Indian atomic energy scene, after Bhabha, and is commonly considered to be Bhabha's closest adviser. His comment concerning the desirable burnup of uranium for production of weapons-grade plutonium indicates sensitivity to the issue, which has been mentioned in recent months by representatives of Westinghouse and General Electric (see Bombay D-400 and D-444). Chakravarti, who completed a very successful career in the Indian railroads before joining Bhabha's staff, has been privately critical on several past occasions of what he claims is Bhabha's ineptness as an administrator.

Although the Consulate General recognizes the pitfalls, it tentatively accepts the view that India has at least not yet embarked on a physical program of nuclear weapons development. Whether India will do so will depend on issues of national policy that transcend even Dr. Bhabha's preeminent role in the field of atomic energy. Prime Minister Nehru's repugnance to the development of nuclear weapons stemmed from a combination of morality and pragmatism which was attuned to India's situation in the world. The moral issue is the same but the realities of the day change. Within the past two years Communist China has emerged as a threat to India's security. Relations with Pakistan have improved but Kashmir remains a stumbling block. Meanwhile, the spread of technology raises the specter of a diffusion of nuclear-weapons capability among countries not now in the "nuclear club." In these circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that responsible Indian officials have at least contemplated if not planned or possibly even

1/ A despatch from Karachi on February 13, 1961 by "The Times of India" News Service quoted Foreign Minister Qadir as follows, in an informal talk to newsmen: "In case India is enabled to manufacture a nuclear device, Pakistan cannot afford to remain complacent. We too shall have to match it. We shall have to make every conceivable effort and explore all possible avenues to do this." (The Times of India, Bombay, February 14, 1961). The Indian Express, Bombay, carried a similar report from its correspondent in Karachi.

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inaugurated some effort at nuclear weapons development. Whatever our assumption concerning the present facts, prudence requires that the assumption be reviewed constantly.

Robert M. Carr
American Consul General

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