

China and Ambassador Ali Asghar Solta-nieh of Iran. A text of a crucial clause that could have saved the Conference was hammered-out. This progress as also the birthday of Les Luck, the Australian Ambassador to the UN-CD, were celebrated with a 'dual-use' lighted cake!

However, after this lunch, during the last working afternoon (7 December), the US insisted on reopening previously agreed text, changed tack to a harder line and finally, two hours before conclusion, proposed that: (a) the ad hoc group (created to evolve the protocol) and its mandate be 'terminated'; and (b) annual meetings of the Conference would not negotiate – but only examine – issues, and provide a report. This US proposal was rejected by, besides India, the European Union, Japan, Canada, Russia, China, Iran, and several other countries. The Euro-

pean Union delegate went so far as to call the US delegation 'liars', adding that in 'decades of multilateral negotiations, we have never experienced this kind of insulting behaviour'.

Diplomats – including from countries militarily allied with the US – view the US decision to brave the odium of isolation at the Fifth BWC Review Conference as indicating the increasingly unilateral positions of the Bush administration on non-proliferation, security and disarmament issues. Scientists are grouped into those who believe the US position was forced by its biotechnological industry which could not countenance any 'inspections' (mandated by the still-born BWC implementation protocol) that might compromise industry's secrets; and those who darkly hint at the existence of a US bio-weapons programme.

For more depressing allied stories, see: www.brad.ac.uk/acad/sbtwc/; www.fas.org/; www.commondreams.org/news2001/1207-05.htm

Editors' note: This news item was contributed by a member of the Editorial Board of *Current Science* who was present during the Conference in Geneva. He adds: 'This story is just one of the burgeoning number of examples of the global inter-relationships between developments in science and technology, military strategy, geo-politics and the practice of the art of diplomacy. Our scientific community would do well to understand and appreciate that their international contacts and collaborative work in science and technology will, *willy-nilly*, be increasingly circumscribed by such evolving geo-political, geo-military and geo-diplomatic dynamics.'

Sophisticated Instrumentation Centre for Applied Research and Testing, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) has set up Regional Sophisticated Instrumentation Centres (RSICs) in different regions of the country to provide sophisticated analytical instruments to help research workers pursue important developments/R&D activities requiring such facilities and for optimal utilization of available resources. About 6000 users from academic, R&D institutions and industries from all over the country are utilizing the facilities, offered by these centres every year.

Recently, a Sophisticated Instrumentation Centre for Applied Research and Testing (SICART) has been set up adjoining the Sardar Patel University in Vallabh Vidyanagar, Anand, Gujarat by Charutar Vidya Mandal (CVM), an educational trust with support from DST under its RSIC programme, for users from Gujarat. The equipment available at this SICART are: Scanning Electron Microscope with EDAX, Transmission Electron Microscope (200 kV), X-ray Diffractometer (powder), Thermal Analysis Instruments (DTA/TGA/DSC), Gas Chromatograph, GC-Mass Spectrometer, HPLC, C-H-N-O-S Microanalyser, Laser Particle Size Analyser, UV-VIS-NIR, FT-IR and ICP Spectrometers, Microhardness Tester, Universal Testing Machine, Liquid Nitrogen Plant and usual sample preparation

accessories associated with these instruments. These facilities have become fully functional during the current year and have been put to use. Equipment including Laser Flash Thermal Conductivity Meter, Gel Permeation Chromatograph and Mercury Porosimeter are in the process of being procured.

SICART will also offer solution to analytical problems, including sample preparation, development of analytical methods for specific needs and interpretation of results, etc. It will also organize courses/workshops regularly on the use and application of various instruments and analytical techniques; train technicians for maintenance and operation of sophisticated instruments and provide consultancy/R&D facilities to the industries in the region and help them in measurement, calibration and testing of quality of raw materials and end products. SICART will also undertake R&D projects in various areas of applied science and technology. Apart from the core team at SICART, expertise available at Sardar Patel University and various institutions around it will be utilized, to offer the various services as mentioned above. Some of these activities/services have already been started by SICART.

The instruments/facilities at SICART will be useful in chemical and material

analysis/testing and characterization, including qualitative and quantitative, elemental molecular/compound analysis, structure determination, surface/topographic studies, study of physical, mechanical, optical and electrical properties of materials and various tests such as tensile, fatigue, compression, impact strengths and environment tests, etc. Purity of inputs, chemicals, natural and synthetic products and raw materials as well as purity of end products can be tested, verified and certified. Apart from the users from academic and R&D institutions, the facilities at SICART will be helpful to a variety of other agencies/organizations. The services provided at SICART are available to any user from anywhere in the country. The services are offered on payment of nominal charges.

The SICART is in the process of getting itself accredited under the National Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL). The SICART has set-up an interactive website www.sicart.ac.in. Users will be able to book their samples as well as receive analysis results on-line. It is also planned to collect samples from the laboratories/user's sites through mobile sample-collection units.

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