

▶ US PAYS UP UN ARREARS BUT LEAVES OUT UNESCO In January, the US took its turn to preside over the United Nations Security Council, whose 15 members set most of the General Assembly's agenda. While the UN Charter holds that the US will always be a member of the council, it also requires governments to pay their dues lest they lose their vote in the assembly. By the UN's calculations, the US was \$1.52 billion in arrears last year. The US doesn't accept that figure, mainly because Congress has decided that the government should pay a maximum of 22% of the UN's bills, rather than the current 25%. Both sides agreed, however, that a minimum of \$255 million had to be paid by the end of 1999. Since last September, the Clinton administration had sent checks totaling \$247 million, including \$151 million paid in the final 10 days of the year.

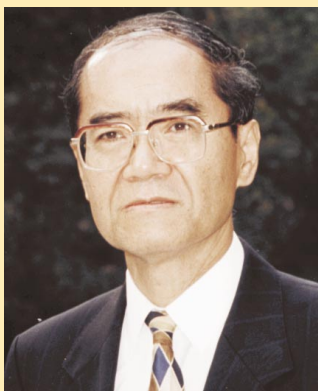
Though \$8 million more remained outstanding on the US's bill, Congress, in one of its last acts before adjourning, had approved repaying \$819 million to the UN over the next three years and forgiving \$107 million the government claims the world body owes the US for peacekeeping functions. Taken together, the total of \$926 million is the amount of the Helms-Biden agreement, cobbled together by Jesse Helms, the North Carolina Republican who chairs the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Joseph R. Biden Jr of Delaware, the committee's senior Democrat. Their measure also requires that the UN first agree to several changes in the way the organization operates, which Helms called "common sense reforms."

The most important of these, first advocated by Helms and Biden in 1997, would limit US payment to 20% of the overall UN budget. Another would have the UN accept a unilateral decision made by Congress in 1994 to cut the US share of the organization's peacekeeping budget from 31% to 25%. As part of the deal, the legislation contains a provision, which expires at the end of fiscal 2000, forbidding any of the \$385 million in US aid to go to international family planning organizations that promote abortion rights—except in cases of rape, incest, or when the life of the woman is endangered—or that lobby to change abortion laws in other countries.

The legislation says nothing about the US rejoining the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which the US left in 1985, along with Britain and Singapore. Britain rejoined UNESCO in 1997 to fulfill a commitment the newly elected Labour Party had made during its election campaign that year. In the US, neither the Reagan, Bush, nor Clinton administrations have proposed returning to UNESCO, mainly because Congress insists the body continues to be ineptly managed and in the thrall of undemocratic forces in Third World nations. In the past decade, UNESCO's then director-general, Francisco Mayor Zaragoza, an urbane Spanish biochemist, had tried to increase the efficiency of the organization's Paris headquarters and, as one US diplomat described his efforts, "get the trains running on time."

Nonetheless, the US State Department has contributed about \$2 million per year to such UNESCO activities as the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the Man in the Biosphere project through nongovernmental bodies like the International Council of Scientific Unions. In 1999, US funding was \$2.25 million, much of this for the World Conference on Science, held in Budapest last June, and attended by representatives of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, National Science Foundation, and Department of Education.

State Department officials hold out hope that significant changes will be forthcoming at UNESCO since the election on 12 November of the new director-general, Koichiro Matsuura, a lawyer and economist who has had a 40-year career



MATSUURA: UNESCO chief

in Japan's foreign service, including five years as ambassador to France. The Japanese government campaigned vigorously for Matsuura's election, seeking to raise its profile in international affairs. He had the active support of Akito Arima, a physicist who had been president of the University of Tokyo and until recently his country's minister of education and research. Matsuura also was backed by Japan's prime minister, Keizo Obuchi, an old schoolchum, who lobbied several European heads of state. In the third (and final) round of voting by UNESCO's executive board, Matsuura obtained 34 of the 58 votes, defeating the two other candidates, one from Saudi Arabia, the other from Egypt. Matsuura has pledged that a more efficient bureaucracy and greater efforts to persuade the US to rejoin the organization are high on his list of priorities.

▶ REMOVING SANCTIONS ON INDIA STILL PERPLEXES ARGONNE In its first effort to scale back the sanctions imposed on nearly 300 research labs and ordnance plants in India and Pakistan after each country tested several nuclear devices in May 1998, the Commerce Department removed 51 of India's organizations from the list. The organizations had not been allowed to receive US exports, and their scientists and engineers had been barred from visiting US labs or attending US meetings.

The action, announced on 16 December, followed a directive in the fiscal 2000 Defense Appropriations Act, which declared that it was the sense of Congress that the list required pruning and refinement so that only organizations that make "material contributions to weapons of mass destruction and missile programs" should be restricted. Among the organizations taken off the list were the Institute of Physics, the Mehta Research Institute of Mathematics and Mathematical Physics, the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics, and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. Indian officials contend that none of these had contributed to the nuclear test program and that the US policy change was an attempt by the Clinton administration to nudge their country toward signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which the US Senate itself had rejected last October. Commerce Department officials say its Bureau of Export Administration continues to review India's research facilities and manufacturing plants as well as similar operations in Pakistan.

Both Indian and US scientists are pleased with Commerce's belated move, which will take a few months to put into effect. But scientists at Argonne National Laboratory continue to be perplexed. Argonne signed a \$1.2 million contract almost a decade ago with the university-based Nuclear Science Center in New Delhi to produce low-energy niobium resonators for a nuclear ion linac at the center. Prototype resonators were delivered by the mid-1990s, and the center ordered 12 more, which were completed just before the nuclear tests, but have been on hold since. The US considered niobium a strategic material, but has not forbidden exports of items manufactured from it. Argonne scientists remain dismayed that sanctions on the Nuclear Science Center weren't lifted. "In punishing India for testing nuclear weapons," says an Argonne scientist, "peaceful research is being set back."

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