

international news

WHEN New Delhi was chosen three years ago as the site for the 26th International Congress of Physiological Sciences, the Indian government gave assurances that nobody would be prevented from attending on the basis of race, citizenship, religion, political philosophy, language or sex. But when the event took place last month, visas were denied to scientists from Taiwan, Portugal, Rhodesia and South Africa, and scientists from Israel were only permitted to attend after attempts to exclude them drew strong international protests.

Those events, which are of course commonplace for conferences held in the Soviet Union, have been brought to the attention of at least one influential international scientific body, with the result that India is likely to slip a few places in the list of desirable locations for scientific jamborees.

New Delhi was selected as the site for this year's meeting by the General Assembly of the International Union of Physiological Sciences (IUPS) in 1971 but it was not until this summer that it became known that the Indian government intended to deny visas to scientists from five countries with whose policies it disagreed. Although no official

India barred conference delegates

reasons have been given, it is generally assumed that the Israelis were to have been excluded because India wanted to stay on the right side of Arab oil suppliers, the Taiwanese because of Taiwan's expulsion from the United Nations, the Portuguese because of Portugal's colonial policies in Africa, and the Rhodesians and South Africans for obvious reasons.

When the news reached the United States National Committee for the IUPS, it immediately called the matter to the attention of the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU), a major international scientific body, and asked the Foreign Secretary of the National Academy of Sciences to open negotiations with the Indian Embassy in Washington.

At the same time, a delegation of physiologists in India met with the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, to try

to persuade her to allow free access to the meeting.

An ICSU General Assembly, held in Istanbul a month before the IUPS Congress, passed a resolution to the effect that repeated incidences of restrictions on free communication between scientists would result in the ICSU advice to its constituent unions not to plan scientific meetings in such countries.

As a result of those pressures, the Indian government relented a little by granting Israeli scientists 21-day landing permits, but it held fast on its decision to exclude Taiwanese, Portuguese, Rhodesian and South African participants. One factor in the decision to allow Israeli participation was probably the fact that three symposia associated with the congress were being held in Israel.

It turned out, however, that no Rhodesians or Portuguese were registered to attend and that the one South African who applied held a British passport. (He later elected to stay away when his South African wife was refused a visa, however.) But five Taiwanese who wanted to attend the meeting were refused visas and thus were excluded from the conference. □

INDIA'S Fuel Policy Committee (FPC, set up in 1971 in the Planning Commission to project a long term energy picture for the country) has finally submitted its report to the government. The Arab-Israeli war of October last year had apparently caught the FPC napping; it was all set to submit its report in December 1973 but found to its chagrin a good number of its assumptions and calculations demolished by a series of unprecedented rises in oil prices. It took almost a year for the FPC to surface again with a report.

One of the central recommendations would like to see the country design her energy policy for the next few decades on the assumption that coal rather than oil would be the energy base of India's economy.

The committee's forecast of India's energy needs by the end of the Fifth Plan period (1978-79) is as follows: 135 million tonnes (Mt) of coal; 34.4 Mt of mineral oil and petroleum products; 120 billion kW h of electricity and 123 Mt of firewood, charcoal and dungcake.

To give effect to a coherent energy

policy, the FPC has made suggestions for administrative reorganisation; it would like the government to set up an energy commission and also an

Indian power plan

from Narender K. Sehgal

energy board comprising representatives from the Planning Commission and ministers concerned with petroleum, mines, railways and irrigation.

In line with its 'back-to-coal' recommendation, the committee has suggested that all new fertiliser projects should plan to use coal as feedstock. But it has also urged that priority should be given to exploration for oil and uranium.

The FPC has strongly recommended popularisation of gobar (dung) gas plants for more effective utilisation of this resource in the domestic and rural sectors. (Incidentally, gobar gas had not found any mention in the FPC's earlier energy projection which it was about to submit in December 1973).

For power generation, the FPC has suggested that hydroelectric schemes on

river systems to the extent of 80 to 100 million kW capacity, be investigated and installed within the next 20 to 30 years. It would also like power stations to be set up at coal pithead sites to ease pressure on movement of coal to existing distant thermal stations.

With regard to nuclear power, the FPC expects that by 1985-90 the country's uranium resources will be able to support an installed capacity of 6 to 8 lakh MW for three decades, and that by that time fast breeder reactors too will have come on line to turn thorium (which India has in great abundance) into fissionable fuel.

The FPC is not enthusiastic about installation of 'captive' power stations by industries (private or public) because, in its view, that would not be in the "overall national interest".

On energy research and development, work on conservation of coal should be given urgent attention since, in the committee's view, reserves of coking coal are not expected to last much longer than 40 years or so, whereas because of the expected industrial growth coal requirements will increase five-fold within the next 20 years.