

After Kakodkar meets PM, Cab Secy steps in

Thursday, February 09, 2006

SHISHIR GUPTA & PRANAB DHAL SAMANTA

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 8 With Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Anil Kakodkar's interview to The Indian Express bringing into the open concerns within on the approach to the nuclear separation plan, the Government has asked Cabinet Secretary B K Chaturvedi to sort out matters so that the Indo-US nuclear deal is sealed in time for a pact to be signed when US President Gorge W Bush arrives here next month.

In this context, Chaturvedi met Kakodkar today and will be meeting Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran. Kakodkar met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday after he was told that he should have waited for the PM to make a statement in Parliament on the matter.

The Cabinet Secretary, who is also a member of the Atomic Energy Commission, was asked to speak to scientists and diplomats to arrive at a final position.

Sources said that at his meeting with Chaturvedi, Kakodkar explained his side of the story, indicating that he went public with his views partly because he was under constant pressure to explain the kind of separation plan (of civilian and military nuclear reactors) that would be credible for the US.

Kakodkar, sources said, emphasised the need for a credible minimum nuclear deterrent, keeping in view the Asian security scenario. He also quantified the sort of deterrent India needs to maintain for the future, explaining that in less than a decade the country's stockpile will begin to feel the impact of uranium's half-life decay cycle.

The nature of separation, he's learnt to have said, will have to take this into consideration to ensure that it does not negatively impact the credible minimum nuclear deterrent.

On the fast breeder reactor programme, Kakodkar again made it clear that India could not afford to put it on the civil list as it would not be in its strategic interests.

Highlighting the dual purposes of the FBR programme, Kakodkar, sources said, did agree that India needed the latest technology in this field and for that the Indo-US nuclear agreement was vital. In fact, both officials agreed that the quest should be to get better technology into India to power the atomic energy programme as a whole.

The one option being looked at was to benefit from the understanding that India will carry out its separation of reactors in a “phased manner”. Phasing would allow New Delhi flexibility in the FBR programme, giving the AEC more time to work out a plan for the future without disturbing the agreement with Washington.

It's learnt that Kakodkar felt India needed to adopt a better negotiating position with the US from where it would be easier to concede on some issues in an effort to find common ground.

URL: [http://www.indianexpress.com/full\\_story.php?content\\_id=87570](http://www.indianexpress.com/full_story.php?content_id=87570)