

Reprocessing is a must: Kakodkar

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Accumulation of spent fuel without proper disposal option unacceptable

MUMBAI: The "India-specific safeguards" the country expects to conclude with the International Atomic Energy Agency as part of the proposed civil nuclear cooperation agreement with the United States "can kick in only after the cooperation starts," Anil Kakodkar, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, told The Hindu in an exclusive interview on Thursday.

Responding to a specific question on restrictive attempts made in the draft U.S. Congressional legislation, he underlined the need for full civil nuclear cooperation as envisaged in the Joint Statement of July 18, 2005: "A situation where the spent fuel simply accumulates without any proper disposal option [that is, India is not allowed to reprocess that spent fuel] is not acceptable."

Let's be positive

Dr. Kakodkar also made it clear that there was no question of India converting its unilateral voluntary moratorium on nuclear tests into a "bilateral entity." However, the policy on the voluntary moratorium announced in 1998 remained unchanged.

Asked what would be India's response if the committed fuel supply was interrupted, Dr. Kakodkar, who is also Secretary in the Department of Atomic Energy, said: "We should approach the whole discussion in a positive manner. We have stated our commitment to the understanding of the July 18, 2005 Joint Statement. Certainly things can move forward on [that] basis."

He emphasised that the objective of India developing international civil nuclear cooperation was to create "additionalities" to the country's electricity supply "without in any way compromising the ongoing domestic programme." India looked at these additionalities in terms of nuclear fuel, nuclear reactors, capital, and so on. "Given the responsible nature of all our activities, there need be no concern with regard to the inputs to the civilian programme creating any benefits to our strategic activities."

No bilateral moratorium

Asked about the attempt in the draft U.S. Senate Bill to change the sequence of steps envisaged in the India-U.S. Joint Statement of July 18, Dr. Kakodkar observed: "The safeguards can kick in only after the cooperation starts. There is no question of the safeguards kicking in before the cooperation. Let us see how the Bill appears in its final shape."

Could he think of any circumstances in which India would need to conduct a nuclear explosive test again, even though it declared a voluntary moratorium on nuclear tests after the 1998 Pokhran tests and the continuance of this voluntary moratorium is mentioned in the Joint Statement? The AEC Chairman's answer was: "The moratorium which has been declared is India's unilateral voluntary moratorium. We don't want to convert that into a bilateral entity. But India's policy in this regard has been continuing right from 1998. That policy stays. No change."

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