

Kakodkar : India talks tough on N-deal with US

Lalitha Vaidyanathan in Mumbai

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Ahead of talks on an agreement to operationalise the Indo-US civil nuclear deal, New Delhi has made it clear that the issue of reprocessing of spent fuel is 'non-negotiable' and it is committed to retaining the right to do so.

"We want reprocessing rights upfront. Reprocessing is a non-negotiable right," Atomic Energy Commission chairman Anil Kakodkar said ahead of negotiations on the 123 Agreement that will pave the way for the actual implementation of the landmark deal.

While retaining full privileges as laid out in the joint statement by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President George W Bush on July 18, 2005 and India's nuclear separation plan of March 2006, New Delhi 'wants all these (issues) to be explicitly addressed', said Kakodkar, one of the architects of the deal.

India's position was always guided by the July 2005 statement and March 2006 understanding, 'but the Hyde Act (passed by the US Congress) deviates significantly from that', he said.

If the 123 Agreement does not go through, India has other options, 'but this will definitely be a setback for the nuclear business community which is aggressively pushing for the deal', Kakodkar observed.

"We expect the negotiators to respect the joint statement of July 18 and March 2006 separation plan and proceed further by taking into account India's concerns which arose after the Hyde Act (that gave the US legislative nod to the deal)," he told PTI in an interview.

Asked when the crucial negotiations on the agreement would resume, the top scientist said, "Both India and US are studying the drafts carefully and serious negotiations would begin fairly soon."

About the Hyde Act's stand on the ban on conducting atomic tests, he said, "India had declared a unilateral moratorium on nuclear tests, but that cannot become a bilateral legality."

He, however, pointed out that the prime minister has repeatedly assured Parliament that the concerns of a section of scientists about the Act will be addressed.

Kakodkar recalled that Bush, during his visit to India in March last year, had expressed his commitment to the July 2005 statement and assured the supply of uranium fuel in perpetuity in exchange for safeguards for imported civil nuclear reactors.

India, he said, will remain firm and not settle for anything less than the terms outlined in the July 2005 joint statement and March 2006 separation plan even though New Delhi has not been recognised as a nuclear weapons state.

Since the thrust of the joint statement, unlike the Hyde Act, is not on non-proliferation but civil nuclear cooperation, India will insist during the negotiations on the same rights and insist on retaining all the rights and power due to it as an independent, responsible sovereign nation, he asserted.

Asked about frequent visits by US businessmen to India over the past three months, he said 'they are exploring different challenges and possibilities' in nuclear commerce.

"US businessmen are meeting various people and I also met them last week and they appreciate India's position (on the deal). They are trying to understand everything in totality," Kakodkar maintained. "India has expressed its concerns arising from the Hyde Act and we have to be concerned about our concerns and we have to insist on them."

Asked about the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd showing urgency in getting reactors from the US for setting up plants, he said, "Everyone works on with their mission and NPCIL has a mission of producing power. However, they cannot do anything which is inconsistent with our national policy."

Asked about progress in uranium production in the country, he said, "It is picking up."

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