

DAE chief to leave for Vienna soon to discuss safeguards with El-Baradei

Pranab Dhal Samanta

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Moving on a key commitment in the nuclear deal with the US, Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Anil Kakodkar is going to Vienna early April to launch negotiations on the safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

New Delhi is working out a proposal on what will be an India-specific agreement with the IAEA. Kakodkar will meet IAEA Director General Mohammed El-Baradei in Vienna to start negotiations on the agreement which will then lay the basis for an additional protocol.

While his negotiations get off the ground in Vienna, three important visitors from Washington will be on their way to India: Speaker of the US House of Representatives and third-highest ranking official in US government hierarchy Dennis Hastert (April 11) followed by Senator Chuck Hagel, a key member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

As Speaker, Hastert is central to floor management in the House of Representatives as the Bill on the nuclear deal is discussed and voted. His visit, therefore, will provide an opportunity for the Indian political leadership to reach out to the Congress.

Before Hastert, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Richard Boucher will be in New Delhi on April 7.

He will discuss the movement on the nuclear deal besides Nepal and Afghanistan. Boucher recently briefed the Nuclear Suppliers Group and is expected to give his feedback.

Having agreed to permanent safeguards on civilian reactors in the deal with the US, sources said, there should not be much of an issue in discussing the terms and conditions for access to facilities. But what will be crucial from an Indian standpoint is to insert a permanent assurance on fuel supplies that was also agreed with the US.

To ensure this, India, US and IAEA will possibly work out a trilateral arrangement and that will have to be indicated in any understanding as India's acceptance of permanent safeguards is directly linked to this assurance.

Similarly, India has made it clear—and this has been accepted by the US— that New Delhi will reserve the right to take "corrective measures" in case supplies are disrupted.

The nature of these measures and how they will be linked to implementing the safeguards agreement would also have to be spelled out through these negotiations.

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