

US shifting goalpost on n-deal: Atomic Energy chief

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Kakodkar Putting Fast Breeder on civilian list affects minimum credible deterrent and long-term energy needs, says DAE Secy

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NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 5 With work on the landmark Indo-US nuclear deal going right down to the wire, the well-entrenched nuclear-scientific-military establishment is getting increasingly wary. Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission Anil Kakodkar has said that Washington's request for placing specific nuclear facilities on the civilian programme amounts to changing "the goalpost."

Calling himself the "biggest champion of the July 18 nuclear deal," Kakodkar, who is also Secretary, Department of Atomic Energy, told The Indian Express in an exclusive interview that as per that agreement, "this determination (of what goes on which list, civilian or military) has to be made by the Indians...(for) India's strategic interests will have to be decided by India and not by others."

According to Kakodkar, the following were exempted from the civilian list first shared with Washington: the Fast Breeder Reactor programme, all facilities at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, the uranium-enrichment facilities off Mysore and "some" of the indigenously developed power reactors, the ones needed to fuel the Fast Breeder programme.

Placing the Fast Breeder programme in the civilian list, Kakodkar said, "will not be in our strategic interest" both for long-term energy security and for maintaining nuclear-weapons capabilities. For, it would push India "into another import trap," constantly dependent on supplies of imported enriched uranium.

"Both, from the point of view of maintaining long term energy security and for maintaining the minimum credible deterrent (as defined by the nuclear doctrine) the Fast Breeder programme just cannot be put on the civilian list. This would amount to getting shackled and India certainly cannot compromise one for the other," he said.

The Department of Atomic Energy, he said, was visualizing that "in the long run, the energy that will come out from the nuclear fuel resources available in India (from domestic uranium and thorium mines) should always form the larger share of the nuclear energy programme as compared to the energy that will be generated from imported nuclear fuel."

"So it is important in the long run that our strategy should be such that the integrity and autonomy of our being able to develop the three-stage nuclear power programme, be maintained, we cannot compromise that."

Admitting that there was a shortage of uranium, Kakodkar said that this is where there are benefits from the Indo-US nuclear deal, since it opens up opportunities for international cooperation especially of civil-nuclear cooperation.

According to Kakodkar once that happens “we can get that as an additionality and that additionality is the important word.”

According to him, India has never had any problems in sourcing reactors or fuel from outside and then putting those under safeguards.

“We have done that in the past, so we can do that again... our track record has been extremely good, so there need not be any fear,” he said.

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