

`Voluntary moratorium cannot become bilateral legality': Kakodkar

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CHENNAI: Anil Kakodkar, Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, has made it clear that India does not want to convert its unilateral, voluntary moratorium on nuclear tests into a bilateral legality with the United States. "We cannot do that," he said. According to Dr. Kakodkar, "What we would like to see is explicit provisions [in the proposed `123 agreement' with the United States] that safeguard our interests in the light of concerns that were expressed in the Parliament by our Prime Minister." He added, "We need everything to be built into the 123 agreement in a very explicit manner so that our interests remain protected."

Dr. Kakodkar, who is also Secretary, Department of Atomic Energy made these remarks in an interview to The Hindu at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, Trombay, on March 2.

Asked about the U.S. officials' insistence during their negotiations with their Indian counterparts on the "123 agreement" that India should not conduct any more nuclear tests and that the U.S. would terminate nuclear cooperation with India if it conducted any tests, he said, "We don't want to convert this [India's unilateral, voluntary moratorium on nuclear tests] into a bilateral legality. We cannot do that. The nuclear testing is a unilateral, voluntary moratorium. So that is the position. Nothing more than that."

On the U.S. stand that not just an Indian nuclear explosion but any event in India that "jeopardises supreme U.S. national interests" would lead to the termination of the proposed Indo-U.S. nuclear cooperation, Dr. Kakodkar commented: "Our position remains the same. The Prime Minister has already very clearly stated our concerns in Parliament. Now we are of course approaching the whole matter in a positive spirit. So what we would like to see is explicit provisions that safeguard our interests in the light of the concerns that were expressed in Parliament by our Prime Minister. That will be the basis with which we will approach the negotiations."

As for Washington's position that it would supply only one extra "core" of fuel lasting about a year for the reactors, the AEC Chairman said: "The March 2006 Separation Plan document has a clear provision for building stockpiles of fuel to meet the life-time requirements of reactors placed under the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards. That is what I am saying. We need everything to be built into the 123 document in a very explicit manner so that our interests are protected."

Dr. Kakodkar confirmed that India's draft of the 123 agreement has been given to the U.S.

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