

'India needs to seek clarification about N-deal'

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Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Dr Anil Kakodkar today admitted to "concerns" regarding the Indo-US nuclear deal 'hindering' the country's domestic nuclear power programme and stressed the need to seek clarifications from the US.

"Certainly, there are concerns and we have to seek clarifications for that. We have to negotiate and ensure that the deal does not impinge on our research and development efforts," the Department of Atomic Energy secretary said after a presentation on energy security at the on-going five-day 94th Indian Science Congress here. However, reiterating that the domestic power programme was "independent", Kakodkar said: "The external help is an additionality, which is always welcome. But, there is no question of it impinging on our R & D." He also emphasised the need for maintaining the tempo of domestic research and development "without any external safeguards hindrances".

Disclosing India's plans for the first 'Advanced Heavy Water Reactor' (AHWR) using thorium as fuel, Kakodkar said the civil works for the 300 MW reactor would start sometime in 2007. The design and pre-licensing safety clearances by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board for the third stage thorium-based AHWR is expected soon. He said the site for the nuclear plant had not been finalised yet, but it may be near the coast or some water body. The AHWR plant would have better safety standards and a design life of 100 years.

Expressing optimism about the country's nuclear power capacity reaching 20,000 MW by 2020, Kakodkar said the DAE would be launching massive exploration activity to find richer uranium ore, which would generate 15 times more electricity than the present low-uranium content ore used in the 'Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors'.

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