

Prime Minister Manmohan's 'no' to US sponsored curbs on FBRs

The US really should butt-out of other nation's business especially when they are scientifically superior.

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India cannot accept international nuclear safeguards on its fast breeder reactor (FBR) programme, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asserted in Parliament on Monday. His suo motu statement in both Houses comes two days ahead of the United States President George W. Bush's arrival.

Referring to the "delicate" negotiations with the U.S. on separation of nuclear facilities under the July 18, 2005 joint statement, he said the "nature of safeguards" was a "pending" issue.

Dr. Singh acknowledged that "certain assurances" in the statement, such as fuel for Tarapur, remained unfulfilled by Washington, but pointed out the U.S. support to New Delhi in joining the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project.

The Government had taken into account the country's strategic weapons needs. The nuclear doctrine, while adhering to the principle of "no first use," envisioned inflicting severe damage on an adversary going in for a first strike.

Three-stage programme

"The facilities for this [dealing with a first strike] and the required level of comfort in terms of our strategic resilience have thus been our criterion in drawing up a separation plan. The three-stage nuclear programme would not be undermined by external interference," Dr. Singh said.

India would offer only the facilities that could be identified as civilian without damaging its deterrence potential or research efforts. The proposed separation plan entailed identifying, in phases, "a number" of thermal nuclear reactors, as civil facilities, amounting to roughly 65 per cent of installed nuclear capacity, by the end of the process.

Some other facilities of the Department of Atomic Energy "may also" be added. The separation plan would create a clearly defined civilian domain where the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards would apply.

"All proposals of the U.S. had been judged on merit. We will take the decision of classification of the facilities. It is essential to recall that the July 18 statement was not about our strategic programme."

"Differing interpretations"

Dr. Singh said he was not underestimating the difficulties that existed in the talks with the U.S.

Pointing out that there were "differing interpretations" of the country's fast breeder programme and fuel-cycle capabilities, such as re-processing and enrichment, he said it

had been conveyed to the U.S. that New Delhi "cannot share" the nature and content of its strategic requirements.

"The separation plan that is being outlined is not only consistent with the imperatives of national security, it also protects our vital research and development interests. We have ensured that our three-stage nuclear programme will not be undermined or hindered by external interference ... in this process the Department of Atomic Energy has been involved at every stage, and the separation plan has been drawn up with their inputs," he said.