

Australia won't sell India uranium

Politics

International Herald Tribune (AP)
March 3, 2006

SYDNEY Australia will not sell uranium to India until it signs the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, despite a nuclear deal between the United States and New Delhi, the Australian foreign minister said Friday.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said he welcomed the U.S. deal with India, sealed Thursday during a visit to New Delhi by President George W. Bush, under which India agreed to open civilian nuclear facilities to international inspections for the first time. The deal removes a U.S. embargo on nuclear supplies to India.

But Downer said Australia would not alter its policy of blocking the sale of uranium to countries that fail to sign onto the nonproliferation treaty.

Although second to Canada in uranium production, Australia has the world's biggest uranium reserves.

"If we were to export uranium to India, that would constitute a significant shift in our policy, it would open up questions of whether we would export uranium to countries like Israel and Pakistan as well," Downer told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. "I think it is probably easier for us to support the current policy.

"It is probably better for us to give all the support we can to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, and our view is one day we would like India to sign that treaty and we haven't withdrawn from that position," Downer added.

He defended continuing negotiations to sell uranium to China, saying Beijing had signed the international treaty.

The Australian prime minister, John Howard, is scheduled to travel to India with a trade delegation next week.

Uranium mining is a politically sensitive issue in Australia, where output and offshore sales have long been restricted.