

Indian scientists oppose new clauses in nuclear deal

They are correct of course.

Reuters
August 14, 2006

Eight top Indian scientists said on Monday revisions proposed by U.S. lawmakers to a landmark civil nuclear deal with the United States could hurt India's ability to research and develop nuclear technology.

The scientists, who include three former chiefs of the Atomic Energy Commission, India's top atomic agency, said in an open letter to members of parliament India should not agree to a deal that placed a perpetual restraint on its nuclear options.

"We have built our capabilities in many sensitive technological areas, which need not and should not be subjected to external control," they said in a joint statement.

While welcoming the broad thrust of the deal, they expressed concern over changes suggested as it has made its way through the U.S. legislature.

"We find that the (Indo-U.S.) deal, in the form approved by the U.S. House of Representatives, infringes on our independence for carrying out indigenous research and development," they said.

"If the U.S. Congress, in its wisdom, passes the bill in its present form, the 'product' will become unacceptable to India."

The deal, under which India will get access to nuclear fuel and equipment in return for international inspections and the separation of civilian and military programmes, received initial approval by the U.S. House of Representatives in July.

The Indian government has said it is concerned about some amendments U.S. Congressmen have proposed to the bill which could impose curbs on India's nuclear program.

The scientists' statement appealed to Indian lawmakers to debate the suggested amendments and ensure they "do not inhibit our future ability to develop and pursue nuclear technologies."

The deal needs to be approved by the U.S. Senate. The House and Senate will vote on it again after negotiations on the technical details of the agreement are completed.

Also, the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group must change its regulations to allow nuclear transfers to India, which conducted nuclear tests in 1974 and again in 1998.

Nuclear non-proliferation experts in the United States say the agreement would allow India to produce nuclear weapons easily because it frees its domestic atomic supplies for military use.