

## Australia for uranium sale to India once US deal is done

Australia Monday said it will consider joining any consensus to authorise global nuclear commerce with India, including the sale of uranium, if and when the India-US nuclear agreement becomes operational.

'If and when the 123 agreement (relating to the India-US nuclear deal) gets to either the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) or the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), Australia will then give consideration to what its attitude to that agreement is,' Foreign Minister Stephen Smith said.

'We will bear in mind the views and the arguments and the importance of the issue to India. The Australian Labor Party has a long standing position which is well known that we don't export uranium to a country which is not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty,' he told reporters here.

At a joint press conference here following the fifth Australia-India Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue, Smith and his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee were at pains to emphasise that while Australia stands by its decision not to export uranium to India, that was not an impediment to stronger bilateral relations.

'There may be divergences of views in certain areas, but that divergence of views need not stand in the way of convergence of mutual interests and expanding on that,' Mukherjee said.

He said he was currently negotiating the proposed civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with the US, which has been opposed by the Left allies of the Manmohan Singh government.

'Naturally, if the entire process is completed, the nuclear trade with India is permissible as per the international arrangements. Then and then only, the question will come. I have come to Australia not with one issue of getting uranium from Australia because we are aware of the position of the Labor Party,' Mukherjee told reporters.

'Australia's commitment to non-proliferation is firm and we respect that,' Mukherjee added.

Smith had told Sky News Monday morning: 'Australia's relations with India needs to be taken to a new level and as I have said in the last few days, a new relationship for a new century. Now uranium is just one small part of that,' .

Smith had told IANS recently: 'Australia as a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will give a thoughtful and serious consideration to joining a consensus to authorise such an agreement. We stand ready to consider the agreement.'

While the former John Howard government had decided to export uranium to India to meet its growing energy needs, subject to the finalisation of the India-US civil nuclear deal and the conclusion of an India-Australia nuclear safeguards agreement, the Labor government headed by Kevin Rudd reversed the decision late last year.

*Neena Bhandari* ( © IANS / India eNews)