

Portugal assures support to India at NSG

Portugal has said that it will support proposal to allow nuclear trade with India at the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

'We (will) support India in the NSG. I had the opportunity to say to the Indian (External Affairs) minister that this is the Portuguese position,' portuguese Minister for Foreign Affairs Luis Amado told reporters here Monday.

'We understand India's concerns to meet its strong demand of energy,' he said.

The minister pointed out that Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Socrates had made a similar announcement of his country's position during his visit to India in December 2007 to attend the India-EU summit.

The Indian government is currently trying to push through the civilian nuclear deal with US through its domestic political barriers, and to get the deal approved before the Bush administration leaves office by the end of this year.

The next step for India would be to sign a safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for its civilian nuclear plants - the draft has reportedly been finalised, but not signed yet.

The government is likely now to sign the agreement, after getting a new political ally, even as the Left parties have threatened to withdraw support if India goes to the IAEA.

Thereafter, the US, supported by Britain and France, would shepherd a proposal in the NSG for modifying its guidelines to allow trade in nuclear fuel and technology with India, a non-signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

But NSG members have been first eager to get a look at the safeguards agreement before agreeing to the proposal by consensus.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is currently on a visit to Japan to attend the G-8 summit, where he is scheduled to meet President Bush Wednesday and also expected to lobby for NSG support among the attending heads of government and state.

Once the NSG allows trade with India, the bilateral agreement for civilian nuclear cooperation will go to the US Congress for an up-and-down vote.

The portuguese minister began his three-day visit to India Monday, accompanied by a delegation of top business leaders with diverse interests ranging from banking to infrastructure.

After his meeting with External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, he addressed Indian business leaders at the Indo-Portuguese Business Council.

On Tuesday, he leaves for Goa to renew ties with Portugal's former colony. He will meet Goa Chief Minister Digamber Kamat and business people. Amado will return to Portugal via [Mumbai](#)

Wednesday.

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