

India secures G8 backing for civil nuclear cooperation

In what is now seen as a well choreographed diplomatic move, India secured the backing of the powerful G8 nations even as it formally approached the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Wednesday to work out an India-specific safeguards agreement for its civil nuclear facilities.

The statement, which was unusually incorporated into the G8 final declaration at the end of its three-day annual summit at the Japanese resort of Toyako, said: 'We look forward to working with India, the IAEA, the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG) and other parties to advance India's non-proliferation commitments and progress so as to facilitate a more robust approach to civil nuclear cooperation with India to help it meet its growing energy needs in a manner that enhances and reinforces the global non-proliferation regime.'

Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon told Indian journalists who accompanied Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Japan that he did not 'anticipate' any 'problem' with any of the major players in the tightly controlled global nuclear trade and watchdog regime - including China and Japan.

'All the G8 nations are on board,' he said as the prime minister returned after having conducted important bilateral talks with individual countries in Sappora and Toyoka, on the sidelines of the G8 and the G8-G5 outreach meetings.

Manmohan Singh and his top officials, including Menon and National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan, individually met with all the G8 leaders who are members of the IAEA and NSG and secured their country's backing to the India-centred safeguard agreement as also exemption from the NSG to conduct global nuclear commerce despite not being a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Manmohan Singh, who conducted back-to-back bilateral meetings entire Tuesday and Wednesday, also met with leaders of Australia, China, Brazil and South Africa and the impression that the Indian delegation carried back was 'none of them would be a hurdle' to realising India's goal of conducting civil nuclear cooperation with the world despite not being part of what it called the 'discriminatory' global non-proliferation regimes.

The US apparently played a key role in securing the backing for India and had the key paragraph inserted in the final G8 document - a very unusual move in itself.

After his meeting with Manmohan Singh in Toyako Wednesday morning, US President George Bush told the media: 'We talked about the Indo-US nuclear deal and how important that is for our respective countries.'

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