

N-deal aimed at ending nuclear isolation: Chidambaram

Defending the India-US civilian nuclear deal, Finance Minister P. Chidambaram Saturday said the government wished to end the country's nuclear isolation and gain access to reactors, fuel and technology.

Delivering the sixth Convocation address at the NALSAR University of Law here, he said the deal would help India end nuclear isolation, which was complete since 1998 and the country was denied access to nuclear reactors, fuel and technology.

'Thanks to our nuclear isolation since 1998, the capacity utilisation of our nuclear power plants has steadily declined from 90 percent in 2001-02 to 63 percent in 2006-07 to 54 percent in 2007-08,' he said.

'India, therefore, wishes to end this nuclear isolation and gain access to reactors, fuel and technology in return for the promise that certain civilian nuclear facilities - to be solely determined by India autonomously - would be segregated and placed under safeguards in a phased manner,' Chidambaram said.

He made it clear that India would pursue its strategic nuclear programme 'without subjecting that programme to any safeguards or inspection'.

The nuclear deal has remained mired in controversies with the Left parties withdrawing their support to the ruling coalition this month, reducing it to a minority, following their differences over it.

Chidambaram expressed a 'sense of disappointment and anguish' over the absence of a 'logical and rational debate' on the nuclear deal.

'Why these issues are not being raised and answered in a logical and rational manner?' he asked, listing out a number of aspects of the deal.

He wondered why lawyers and legal scholars were keeping away from the debate and said institutions like NALSAR should join the debate to help highlight the facts.

'If a reasoned debate had taken place, the answers to some of the issues would have been self-evident and answers to other issues could have been found through application of law and logic to the facts of the case,' he said.

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