

## House panel chief not ready to waive rules for India deal

As the Bush administration prepared to present the India-US civil nuclear deal to the US Congress for final approval, a key lawmaker reiterated his opposition to a change of rules to ensure its quick passage.

'I support cooperation on civilian nuclear energy with India,' said Howard L. Berman, Democratic, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Sunday, noting he had voted for the Hyde Act, the US enabling law for the India deal.

But 'I oppose policies that would lead to a nuclear arms race or undermine proliferation standards,' he said amid expectations that the administration would present the deal to the Congress this week following the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) decision to give India a waiver for nuclear trade.

'Before we vote, Congress needs to study the NSG decision, along with any agreements that were made behind the scenes to bring it about,' he said.

'If the Administration wants to seek special procedures to speed congressional consideration, it will have to show how the NSG decision is consistent with the Hyde Act, as Secretary Rice promised, including which technologies can be sent to India and what impact a nuclear test by India would have.'

In an appearance before the House panel Feb 13, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had assured him that any NSG decision 'will have to be completely consistent with the obligations of the Hyde Act,' he said.

'The burden of proof is on the Bush administration so that Congress can be assured that what we're being asked to approve conforms with US law,' Berman said.

The Hyde Act and the Atomic Energy Act require that after the administration submits the India deal to Congress, 30 days of continuous congressional session must elapse before a resolution of approval can be introduced, he noted. 'Only by first passing new legislation could Congress set aside the 30-day requirement,' Berman said.

The Berman damper came as Rice outlined plans to speak to US Congress leaders Monday or Tuesday to push for the passage of the deal before the lawmakers adjourned Sep 26 to campaign in the Nov 4 US election.

Noting that 'the time is very short', Rice said she had already talked several weeks before the NSG Vienna meeting 'to relevant committee chairs about trying to get it done.'

'And I will have those conversations again, most likely on Monday or Tuesday, as well as trying to see whether the leadership believes that this can go forward,' she told US press travelling with her in Algiers Saturday.

Unlike Berman, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Joe Biden, who is now Obama's running mate, has vowed to push the nuclear deal in the Congress 'like the devil' if [New Delhi](#) gets its end done.

Biden, who as then ranking member of the Republican controlled panel, played a key role in getting the Hyde Act passed in a lame duck session in December 2006, is again expected to get into the act to see the deal through in the narrow time window available despite his own preoccupations as a vice presidential candidate.

Both the presidential candidates, Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama, too are supportive of the deal. On Sunday they welcomed the nuclear cartel's waiver for India and asked the Bush administration to present the India-US civil nuclear deal to the Congress quickly.

Meanwhile, Ashok Mago, chairman of the USIndia Forum, appealed to Berman to soften his stand noting 'undue delay will not be helpful for US businesses'.

'This agreement has unconditional support in its present form from leadership of your party and your counterpart in the senate, Senator Joe Biden,' he said.

*Arun Kumar* ( © IANS / India eNews)