

India to discuss n-deal with IAEA after Left nod

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government said Friday it will go ahead with talks on the Indo-US nuclear deal with the IAEA after its Left allies that were earlier bitterly opposed to the negotiations gave the nod for it to go ahead.

External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee made the announcement after a 90-minute between partners of the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the four Communist parties supporting the government.

Reading a prepared statement, a visibly relieved Mukherjee said the UPA and Left leaders 'discussed the implications of the (US) Hyde Act on the 123 agreement (that accompany the civil nuclear deal) on foreign policy and security matters.

'After further discussion, it was decided that the impact of the provisions of the Hyde Act and the 123 agreement on the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) safeguards agreement should also be examined,' he said after emerging from his South Block office.

The minister, who had led the government side in hard bargaining with its leftist allies, added that working out the text of the India specific safeguards agreement would require talks with the IAEA Secretariat in Vienna.

He said the outcome of the talks with the IAEA would be placed before the 15-member UPA-Left panel for its consideration.

This in effect means that the Left would still hold the veto power on any safeguards agreement - a position which communist sources say would more or less kill the civil nuclear deal.

The UPA-Left gathering started 30 minutes late because an earlier meeting of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), Communist Party of India (CPI), Forward Bloc and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) that began at 3 p.m. at the CPI-M headquarters went on for 90 long minutes before of differences among them.

The RSP and Forward Bloc were bitter that the CPI and the bigger CPI-M were willing to reverse what they had preached for weeks and allow the government to go to the IAEA headquarters.

CPI-M general secretary Prakash Karat and CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan argued that Manmohan Singh had sought from them a honourable exit out of the mess caused by the nuclear deal row.

The prime minister, Karat explained to his colleagues, had stated to him and Bardhan that the government would have to go ahead with the talks with the IAEA to save face and that the Left should let them do that.

But the government, Karat went on, had promised the Communists that the government would not make the nuclear deal operational unless the Left gave its final go ahead.

He added that the government should not sign any pact with the IAEA.

The CPI-M and the other parties have argued that the Indo-US deal, which is expected to end India's nuclear isolation, would make [New Delhi](#) a junior partner to the US in the larger strategic issues.

Forward Bloc and RSP leaders were not convinced by Karat's explanations. Asked how they will explain their U-turn to their supporters, the leader of one of the parties retorted: 'Ask the AKG Bhavan!' The CPI-M headquarters is located at the AKG Bhavan here.

Later, at the UPA-Left meeting, one Left leader told the government representatives: 'Upon your promise to get back to us, we are giving you another chance (on the nuclear deal).'

The next meeting of the UPA-Left nuclear committee will meet after the Gujarat assembly elections next month. The Indian talks with the IAEA will also be over by the end of December.

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