

US welcomes Indian ratification of nuclear liability pact

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Washington: The US has welcomed India's ratification of an international convention on nuclear energy accident liability, removing the last hurdle for the landmark India-US nuclear deal and paving the way for US firms to build nuclear plants in India.

"The United States welcomes the action by India to join the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage (CSC)," State Department spokesman John Kirby told reporters here Friday.

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"Indian membership in the CSC marks another important step towards creating the global nuclear liability regime called for by the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) Nuclear Safety Action Plan," he said.

It will "also facilitate participation by companies from the United States in the construction of nuclear reactors in India, which will mean more reliable electricity for Indians," Kirby said.

It will also reduce "India's reliance on carbon-intensive sources, that will benefit the environment, and will offer India greater energy security for its large and growing economy," he said.

Kirby suggested the ratification would help the implementation of the India-US nuclear deal which has been stalled over India's tough 2010 nuclear liability law that holds the plant supplier liable for damages in the event of an accident.

"We believe it's an important step toward creating a global nuclear liability regime and it'll facilitate international cooperation in expanding the use of nuclear power in India," he said. But only the Department of Energy could spell out the next steps.

Ratification of the convention which will come into force for India on May 4 marks the conclusive step in the addressing of issues related to civil nuclear liability in India, according to Indian officials.

Other steps included the launch in June 2015 of the India Nuclear Insurance Pool (INIP) with a liability cap of 15 billion rupees (\$222 million) to assuage suppliers' concerns.

According to a media report Toshiba Corp's Westinghouse Electric hopes to clinch a deal to build six nuclear reactors in India by end-March in time for a possible visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington to attend a global nuclear summit.

Westinghouse which is negotiating with the state-run operator Nuclear Power Corp of India Ltd (NPCIL) hopes to make a "commercially significant announcement" during Modi's expected US visit in March and sign a final contract later in the year, the report said.

The contract would give a big boost to India's \$150 billion nuclear power programme, and a broader push to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

- IANS