

President arrives in Namibia,uranium supply may dominate talks

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Windhoek: President Pranab Mukherjee Wednesday arrived in Namibia for a two-day state visit during which key negotiations on Uranium supply for civil nuclear use will take place besides other bilateral issues.

Namibia despite being one of the largest producer of Uranium and having a treaty with India for peaceful use of nukes does not supply the fuel to India because of Palindaba treaty among African Union countries which bars export of the element to non-NPT signatories.

"Regarding uranium, there is a proposal which has been pending at their end basically because of African Union decisions. Whether we can move them along, in terms of becoming a supplier of uranium for us that is one of the key objectives that we have there," Secretary (Economic Relations) Amar Sinha had said.

The treaty signed in 2009 with India sets the framework for long term supply of uranium but it is pending ratification by Namibian Parliament.

"Namibia as you know is the fourth largest producer of uranium, but they have an African Union Agreement which sort of impedes the implementation of agreement. Namibia has not been able to break that unity, the binding commitment that they took, it's called the Pelindaba Treaty," Sinha had said.

During talks, India might raise the issue of uranium supply impressing upon Namibia.

"And the fact is because this MoU which we thought will kick in quickly has not happened and we have had been looking in signing agreements with other countries like Kazakhstan, Australia and few others. So eventually if we actually meet our requirements from non-Namibian sources, it will be a loss for the Namibian industry," he said.

The strength of Namibian economy is mineral with mining sector which contributes around 11 per cent to the GDP and it fetches 50 per cent of their foreign exchange earnings making them highly dependent on that.

Another material in abundance is diamond but the mining works through long-term contracts, monopolies and cartels so despite being largest users of diamonds, it does not reaches Indian shores directly from Namibia.

"We are one of the largest users of the diamonds in terms of the polishing and finishing but it doesn't comes directly to us and I don't think there is possibility right now because they have a long term commitment with DeBeers. Indian diamond merchants based outside in Antwerp source it from DeBeers and then it gets shipped to India," he said.

India will offer assistance to Namibia in setting up Mining Engineering trading set up.
Four MoUs will be signed during the trip which include

Deputation of Indian Army for training purposes to Namibian Defence Forces, Centre of Excellence in Information Technology.

"Then there will be a MoU between Namibian Institute of Public Administration and Management and our own IIM Ahmedabad and also between their Public Administration and our Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy which trains civil servants because they are focused on developing their own capacities," he said.

Mukherjee's visit which is the third and final leg of his three-nation tour is first by an Indian Head of State to Namibia in the last 21 years.

"Here in Namibia, the last visit of Head of State was made 21 years ago in 1995 and then Prime Minister (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee had visited in 1998. At that time legendary Sam Nujoma used to head Namibia and he was particularly beholden to India and was a very close friend to India politically," he said.

The visit of Mukherjee is also seen as "renewing political contact" with Namibia which has emerged as a country where democracy has firmed its roots, he added.

Besides crucial talks with President Hage G Geingob, Mukherjee will also address Namibian Parliament, besides visiting Independence Memorial Museum, Heroes Acre Memorial, addressing students and faculty of Namibia Institute of Science and Technology, a visit to Okapuka ranch and addressing Indian community.

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