



## **Not limited to America**

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### *India will be doing nuclear trade with the world*

Whether one is in favour of or against the India-US nuclear deal, it remains a saga of paradoxes and ironies. The first paradox: Why is it called the 'US deal'? From the start, it has been a global deal. And the first irony: By the end of the month, a similar 'deal' will be operational between France and India and a few weeks later between Russia and India (and this without any other conditionalities than those imposed by the IAEA and the NSG), while the 'US deal' will still be waiting for the approval of the Congress.

For reasons best known to the Prime Minister and his PMO, the deal has been projected in the Indian media and the Indian Parliament as an 'American deal'. The Government, the Press, 'experts' and TV commentators have given, *ad nauseam*, their views on the 'US nuclear deal' and this for three years. What about the deals with France and Russia? It has been forgotten that both were initiated by their respective Governments in January 2008.

It would certainly have been cleverer on the part of the Prime Minister to speak about a global deal instead of an American deal alone. The deal would certainly have become more palatable for many. Why Mr Manmohan Singh decided to focus only on the US is a mystery. One reason could be that in this type of a deal, there are often 'deals within deals' (possibly for the 126 multi-role combat aircraft the IAF is in the process of acquiring) of which the people and Parliament are ignorant. While travelling in France, where I am at present, I have faced another

irony. I received an e-mail from the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board, announcing five hours of load-shedding per day. This pathetic situation will presumably last for several months. In the 1970s, France had the wisdom to opt for nuclear energy and, as a result, power cuts are unknown here. In fact, a friend of mine grumbled to me (the French are notorious grumblers) that there had recently been a milli-second power cut in Paris which may have garbled some data in his computer!

Another serious paradox is that India would like to be an economic force to reckon with. For this, India needs power. Is not nuclear energy the cleanest today? To refuse a 'deal', as the Communists have done for three years, is simply to put India's growth aside for short-term political gain. A further paradox is that the vote in the Lok Sabha on the motion of confidence had nothing to do with the deal. Some MPs even admitted that they had not read the draft agreement with the IAEA, as in any case they were not interested. They voted either against 'communal forces' (read BJP) or the Communists, or for the Muslims (who were supposed to be against the deal).

The problem with the British system of Parliamentary democracy adopted by India after Independence is that each representative seems to be only interested in his petty parochial interests (first lining his own pocket, then his family and then his cast, etc). The nation has no place in his vision of the world. Who bothers to think of India's interests?

During the debate on the nuclear deal, one of the main objections to the deal was that India's option to carry out further nuclear tests to upgrade its strategic deterrence capacity would be closed while the P5 would have the right to maintain an upgraded nuclear arsenal. In other words, India would not be able to join the the 'Club of Five'. But the problem is that India missed the bus back in the 1950s, when a seat in the Security Council was offered to it, and again in the 1960s when it could have conducted necessary nuclear tests. The Chinese tested the bomb till 1996 and it is only after they had sufficient data that they signed the NPT. In any case, the world has changed. There is a great danger of

proliferation on account of unwanted players; the rules have become more strict. To obtain a truly 'special' status for India is a difficult proposal -- therefore, the Government has had to compromise by separating the civilian nuclear facilities from the military nuclear facilities.

A last irony: In Paris, I tried to find out if France would go ahead with the deal regardless of the outcome of the debate in the US Congress. I was made to understand that "there is so much preparatory footwork to be done by French and Russian companies that by the time a concrete agreement for a nuclear plant is concluded, the US will be on board." In other words, let us wait for 'Big Brother' to take the first step.