

[24 April, 2003]

RAJYA SABHA

*486. [*The Questioners (Shri V. V. Raghavan and Shri Ram Jethamalani) were absent* For answer vide page 36.]

Revival of Indo-US Cooperation

*487. SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH:†

SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the visit of the Chairman of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission has reactivated Indo-US cooperation in the civilian nuclear field which was affected by the post-Pokhran sanctions;

(b) if so, whether on the Indo-US cooperation front, two new programmes have been added to the original three, which were agreed to in mid-1990s but remained dormant;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) to what extent the above visit has boosted the nuclear ties between the two countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF ATOMIC ENERGY (SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE): (a) The visit of Chairman of US Nuclear Regulatory Commission has helped to reactivate the Indo-US cooperation in the field of nuclear safety.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) The two new areas are:

(i) Risk Informed Performance based Regulation;

(ii) Procedures for Licence Renewal and Periodic Safety Review.

(d) The visit of US officials has added momentum to the ongoing dialogue between the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board of India and Nuclear Regulatory Commission of US for cooperation in the field of nuclear safety.

SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to know whether the Government would consider making the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board of India completely autonomous instead of its being an appendage of the Department of Atomic energy. If you keep it under the Department, nothing much is going to happen. Why dont you consider making it an autonomous body so that it can function properly and the advice of the experts be taken without being pressurised one way or the other?

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri K. Natwar Singh.

SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE: Sir, the hon. Member is aware more than I am that this dialogue really started in 1993 when the Chairman, Mr. Evan, from America visited India. In April, 1998 when the Pokhran II blasts took place, sanctions were imposed by the United States. Thereafter, when our Prime Minister visited United States in the end of November 2001, this was resumed. Today, this process has started and I am hopeful that more negotiations would take place.

SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH: No, Sir. You have not answered my question, Mr. Minister. I asked whether the Government would consider making the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board of India an autonomous body and not a subservient body of the Department of Atomic Energy. That is what I have asked.

SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE: Sir, with due respect if I may say so, it is not really a subservient body. It is discharging its functions with distinction. If such a question arises in future, we will certainly consider it.

SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH: But what is your objection to making it an autonomous body? What is the reservation? Have you examined this particular matter?

SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE: Sir, the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board of India is not a part of the Department of Atomic Energy at all. It is not.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Sir, issues of nuclear safety have been raised from time to time in this House. I have myself, on a number of occasions, drawn the attention of the Government of India to ensure that we have foolproof methods of nuclear safety. It is in this context that the issue has also been raised that the Nuclear Energy Regulatory Board should be truly autonomous of the Department of Atomic Energy. Would the Government consider doing anything in this matter? That was the question that Mr. Natwar Singh asked.

SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE: Sir, this body is not part of the Department of Atomic Energy. It is, in fact, an independent body but they have to work in unison, in collaboration with each other. That is the position.

DR. KARAN SINGH: Mr. Chairman, Sir, in this whole scene, one of the areas of great importance is the disposal of nuclear wastes. We are talking about the Indo-US cooperation. They are burying it underground,

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it pollutes the ground; they are putting it in the ocean, it pollutes the water; they are shooting it out in the outer space, it pollutes the environment. Is part of the Indo-US cooperation also going to cover expertise and an exchange of ideas with regard to the safe disposal of nuclear wastes, particularly because on an earlier question, there was a mention that eight new nuclear plants are going to come up and there is going to be a great deal of nuclear waste available. What is the Ministry doing about that?

SHRI SATYABRATA MOOKHERJEE: Sir, we have, in fact, our own procedure of disposal of the nuclear wastes. But, certainly, this is an area where we can work together and find out whether we can cooperate or not.

DR. RAJA RAMANNA: Mr. Chairman, Sir, dealing with Atomic Energy, we have to take into account the fact that there are several activities which go on simultaneously in this department. The Atomic Energy development itself involves many other activities. Now we have to give certain priorities with respect to the public. One is safety. It is already autonomous, in the sense that neither private industry nor public industry. In fact, it does not even report directly to the Atomic Energy Commission. It reports to the prime Minister directly. This has an advantage that it has the freedom of going right to the top for appropriate decisions that are necessary and it has a control on the information that comes in and goes out. As you are aware, the Government is in the most confused state of affairs with respect to the Atomic Energy, its secrecies and its functioning in different parts of the country. Sir, under these circumstances, my answer to the hon. Member, through you, is we should not...

SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH: Mr. Minister, you should have answered it. Mr. Minister, you should have given this answer. Dr. Raja Ramanna does not have to give this answer. Sir, he has to give this answer.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Minister has already given the answer.

SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH: Sir, the Minister should have given this answer. He should have consulted Dr. Ramanna.

DR. RAJA RAMANNA: I am not answering my question. I am just saying it through you, sir, to pass it on.