

Link disarmament to FMCT

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BANGALORE: The National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) here is working on policy approaches to the upcoming negotiations for the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT), as it did for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996, which was unofficially submitted to the government.

The 1996 document, in essence, advised the government to go in for testing, including a thermo-nuclear device, and then sign the CTBT. The Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) was in readiness to do so. It elaborated on various options with regard to testing and signing. Current thinking at the NIAS, which frequently works with government agencies at various levels, favours signing the CTBT, the path for which has been cleared by the country's scientists, who henceforth, are confident of working with computer simulations without resorting to critical tests.

Having opposed the CTBT as discriminatory, and insisting on time-bound disarmament all along, it is now in a position where it will sign, after having tested. In other words, it has opened itself up to the criticism of joining the very unfair world order that it had opposed. Notes Prof D. Rajagopal, head of the NIAS International Affairs and Strategic Studies unit: "So what should be done now is to strongly endorse the view of the G-21 (including NAM) to link disarmament to FMCT. The fact remains that western countries are looking after their own interests, while they put curbs on others. We tested, having had no option but to weaponise. Now we have to push for the disarmament agenda, at least on FMCT," he said.

Of course, the fact remains that even the FMCT is not a disarmament treaty, but a non-proliferation treaty, which is per se discriminatory.

But unless this is done, India would seem to have given up its insistence on disarmament, which other Third World countries, especially NAM, would not like. On signing the CTBT, while conflicting signals continue to emerge from the various ministries and the Prime Minister himself, NIAS envisions the treaty being signed soon enough. "We have nothing to lose now," says Mr Rajagopal. "We had advised that testing be done, when China and France tested, as it will then be difficult to isolate us and heap blame. Having missed that, the next best time has been chosen. There is no point in signing it without testing. And if we do not sign it, when the deadline for the treaty draws to a close next year, we could end up facing enormous pressure."

The FMCT envisages a cut-off on the production of fissile material like bomb-grade uranium and plutonium, while subjecting to full scope safe-guards all facilities producing fissile material, and monitoring future production. Pakistan, Egypt and other countries want 'zero level' or retrospective cut-off, ie, complete elimination of fissile material, while the US and other weapon states, want a prospective cut-off. India's policy, of course, has not been stated, but is expected to tilt towards prospective cut-off considering that is a *de facto* nuclear weapons state, with some kind of stockpile. "A prospective cut-off would, of course, mean capping countries at various levels. It has been suggested that countries like China, India and Pakistan can progressively join the treaty, as and when the stockpile of the P-5 is reduced to their corresponding levels."

The approach of the P-5 to reprocessing (nuclear fuels) is guided by proliferation concerns while India's approach is guided by how the plutonium in the spent fuel can be put to use with energy production in mind, and further use it as a means of exploiting thorium available in plenty.