

Making n-weapons, testing unnecessary: Top Indian scientist

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Chennai: Even as parliament debates the Indo-US civilian nuclear deal, one of the country's most eminent senior scientists has called for India to take the initiative to eliminate nuclear bombs, saying "making nuclear weapons, even testing is completely unnecessary, and India should go back to what Rajiv Gandhi had advocated" - a nuclear weapons-free world.

Member of the Atomic Energy Commission and a former chairman of the body, MR Srinivasan debunked the idea of a "strategic interest" and made it clear that if anyone thought the contentious deal will allow India to make more bombs or cap the capability, they were both wrong.

In 1988, Congress leader and former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had presented to the UN General Assembly a detailed "Action Plan for Ushering in a Nuclear Weapon Free and Non-Violent World". The initiative then found no takers in India and elsewhere in the world.

The Indo-US nuclear deal is being opposed by political parties who fear India's strategic interests will be compromised, in other words, weapon-making will be capped.

Srinivasan, who helped build the first two MAPS reactors (Madras Atomic Power Station), says the way for the world to progress is "if the existing nuclear weapons are eliminated in a time bound manner".

India has tested nuclear weapons twice, in 1974 and in 1998. "But India is not a country by nature eager to conduct a test," he says.

"In 1998, after Pokharan II, then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had said India was placing a voluntary moratorium on testing, making the obligation *de jure* (legal). He had at the time even said India will not come in the way of CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty)."

"Why would India need to do more tests? Countries like the USA, France, China have done enough tests," Srinivasan told *IANS* in an interview, adding the argument does not hold that India needs to test more nuclear weapons.

The question that needs to be asked is what if the US and China do more tests, he said, noting that politically it is an unsound argument that the USA will conduct fresh tests while asking other countries like India not to test.

And why would China do fresh tests? "Only if it wants to answer a US test," Srinivasan pointed out, adding that in January this year security experts like Henry Kissinger, George Shultz, William Perry and Sam Nunn had urged the USA "to lead in the creation of a world without weapons", arguing that reliance on nuclear weapons as deterrent "is increasingly becoming hazardous and decreasingly effective".

"That is the only way forward," Srinivasan said, advocating that India should "evolve a framework where n-weapon becomes unnecessary for everybody, also testing".

"India has produced a bomb as a deterrent, but it is not a good thing to keep them or make more and more n-bombs," the noted scientist said, explaining that it was not something one stockpiled.

"Maturity demands we (India) must be asking to reduce n-weapons. You can never use them, a nuclear bomb is absolutely useless."

Answering a question on why Indian scientists had first opposed the Indo-US nuclear deal and were now for the deal, Srinivasan said: "There was the June 2005 agreement (document) which Kakodkar (Anil Kakodkar, AEC chairman) and others had accepted."

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"In 2006, Kakodkar had felt that the United States had shifted its goalpost. Some of us also held the same view. Then the Prime Minister clarified the government's position to parliament, we have accepted it. The agreement provides for non-hindrance".

Asked what exactly are the exceptions to safeguards the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is making in case of India, Srinivasan said, "It would be wrong to use the word exception."

"It is not being used in context of INFCIRC 66 (safeguards put in place in 1966 and issued as IAEA information circulars.) These are facility-specific safeguards. India observes these safeguards for its Tarapore and Rajasthan facilities and has agreed to them for Koodankulam too. What India is negotiating is safeguards based on INFCIRC 66."

"Then there is another pattern of safeguards - INFCIRC/153, these are safeguards for NPT countries (those who have signed the non-proliferation treaty. India has not).