

'Have to carry Left, nobody will sign deal with a minority govt'

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For the first time, the Government has made it clear that the Left's withdrawal of support will effectively derail the Indo-US nuclear deal.

Ending speculation over whether a minority government can go ahead with the deal, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said: "We have to carry our supporters with us (the Left) because if they withdraw support, then the Government will be in a minority. Nobody is going to sign an international agreement of this nature with a minority government."

This remark assumes significance given the speculation in political circles that if the Left withdraws support, the Government could still go ahead with the deal. Such speculation was reinforced when CPM general secretary Prakash Karat said that the CPM would not be party if and when the nuclear deal went through.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Mukherjee, however, underlined that "time, no doubt, is of the essence," and admitted that the negotiations with the IAEA, "have taken longer than originally estimated."

Elaborating, Mukherjee, who heads the UPA-Left Front's coordination committee on the nuclear deal said, "We are currently engaged in negotiations with the IAEA and after that is completed, we have to again discuss with the Left leaders. After that will come amendments to the Nuclear Suppliers Group and it is difficult to say how long it will take for all this to be completed."

The External Affairs Minister also said that opposition of the Left parties on the nuclear deal, had virtually stalled India's chances of signing a civilian nuclear agreement with other countries at this stage.

"They (the Left parties) say you cannot have the 123 agreement with USA. You can have nuclear agreements with other countries. But that, too, is not possible because with whomever you enter into an agreement, whether it is Russia or France, you also need the India-specific safeguards and the amended NSG guidelines," Mukherjee said.

He also spoke about the indispensability of USA as a nuclear ally. "There are 45 members of the NSG and USA is an important player. So how can you ignore the USA? These are problems India will now have to accept. So even if we forget about what the Left is saying, the fact is that if we want to do nuclear trade with any country these two things (IAEA agreement and fresh NSG guidelines) are essentially required. With the USA, we also have to sign the 123 agreement."