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## India and the NSG Fiasco: Was it Avoidable?

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By Dr. S. Chandrasekharan.

Someone had described India's bid for membership in the Nuclear Supply Group as a "manic desire." I cannot agree more with this assessment. I felt sad and disappointed that our Prime Minister had put his own prestige at stake by personally appealing to Xi Jinping to be fair, little realising that China has never been fair so far as India is concerned. Pakistan or no Pakistan, the Chinese efforts all along have been and will continue to be, more so now, to keep **India strategically weak**.

In the end, as expected China more than anyone else stood in the way of India getting admitted in the NSG in the plenary session held in Seoul a few days back. The official spokesperson of the MEA was candid enough to admit that it was due to "procedural hurdles persistently raised by one country." He was not even willing to name the country!

It looks that with so many years of experience and with scores of Chinese scholars and analysts we have still not understood the Chinese. Former experienced ambassadors like Shyam Saran should have advised the government not to go "all out" and get humiliated.

### **Do we need the NSG?**

From what is seen from the media and official sources, membership of NSG would help India

\* in getting assured and easy supplies of nuclear fuel from other countries.

\* help Indian manufacturers and suppliers of nuclear components to bid in various countries.

The real reason is that India wanted to be at the “High Table” with the other 48 countries in the Group that is said to have been formed to “prevent nuclear proliferation” by having sufficient control over nuclear related supplies. This group includes countries like Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Cyprus, Croatia etc. who have nothing to do either with the manufacture of nuclear components or supply of nuclear fuel.

One could argue that having become a member of the MTCR, India would like to be fully involved internationally with other countries in agreements like the ‘Australia Group’ and the ‘Wassenaar Agreement’.

But India is not a signatory to the NPT nor will it ever be. It was not surprising that China used this stick to deny membership to the NSG.

To me, it looks that the Civil Nuclear agreement with the USA and the waiver given on September 6, 2008 would have been sufficient to continue with India's current nuclear programme.

The waiver which is not time bound or restricted to Indo-US civil nuclear agreement would have been enough to transfer trigger list items and/or related technology as well as “nuclear related dual use of equipment, materials software and related technology to India for peaceful purposes and for use in IAEA safeguarded civil nuclear facilities.”

India is already getting fuel supplies from Russia, France, Canada, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. These supplies are now sufficient for running the civil nuclear reactors under full IAEA safeguards.

India has 21 nuclear reactors in all with a capacity of 5780 MW and of these 13 reactors with the capacity of 3380 MW are under full safeguards. Even with full membership in the NSG, India cannot get nuclear fuel for its un safeguarded civil reactors. Then what purpose would it have served in getting full membership in the NSG and what was the purpose for this all out “diplomatic aggression.”?

In this context, one should examine what has happened to the experimental 500 MW (PFBR) Kalpakkam Reactor which was supposed to go critical in July 2015. If only we had managed to overcome the thorium route, India can produce enough nuclear fuel on its own.

We have spent over 5500 Crores on the experimental Kalpakkam PFBR project and one would like to know what is happening to the experiment? If the ISRO can give an outstanding performance what prevents BARC that has been headed by giants like Dr. Chidambaram and Dr. Kakodkar from producing a similar performance.?

It is not that the BARC does not have outstanding scientists. There are many. Many may not know that the Dhruv reactor which has an excellent record both in design and performance was done internally in record time by one of BARC's outstanding Scientist!

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