

Kudankulam-II to be Commissioned in 6-8 Months: Indian Envoy

The New Indian Express 16.07.2015

By PTI

MOSCOW: The second unit of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in Tamil Nadu will be commissioned in the next 6-8 months amid efforts to expedite the setting up of 12 atomic plants proposed to be built by Russia in India in two decades. Giving this information here, Indian Ambassador to Russia P S Raghavan said discussions are underway on the units III, IV, V and VI to be built at Kudankulam.

Process is also underway to identify a site in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh for a plant which was proposed to be set up in Haripur in West Bengal but could not materialise due to various factors, including protests by locals. "We are committed to the Russians... In last December (during the visit of President Vladimir Putin to India), we had decided that we will speed up the nuclear plant manufacture and that in two decades, we will have 12 power plants," Raghavan told PTI in an interview here.

Asked about the progress on unit-II of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP) which is behind schedule, he said work is underway on the unit which will have the capacity to generate 1,000 MW of electricity. "Hot run is already going on...I would say that in the next 6-8 months, it should be fully commissioned. It should be onstream," the Ambassador said. "There has been a little bit of delay but that is not significant delay," he said.

Commissioning of the unit-II has been put off four times so far. The last time the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) had postponed putting the unit into commercial operation was this month. On the causes for the delay, the Indian Ambassador said part of it was that after Fukushima radiation exposure of 2011, there has been a "progressive tightening" of safety regulations by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB). "As you go along, they specify more tests, more shutdown periods and longer test-running," he said.

Besides, part of the delay was on account of "their equipment matching with our equipment", Raghavan said. With regard to units III and IV, he said 'long cycle' contracts have been done. "So, it is going well," Raghavan said, adding that, "we are already talking about how to do unit V and VI." He said that work is also underway to identify another site for Russian nuclear plants, in place of Haripur in West Bengal where problems had erupted.

"Some places have been identified... Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have shown interest in nuclear power plants," Raghavan said.

Asked whether zeroing in on a site is taking place, Raghavan said, "It is for Atomic Energy Commission and Department of Atomic Energy...Eventually, they will identify a site that satisfies all the conditions. AERB has to accept it." When pointed out that Haripur had faced problems because of protests by locals, he said, "Local acceptability is part of the criteria besides population pattern and soil conditions."

Other criteria, especially post-Fukushima, are soil conditions, seismic conditions, ecological conditions and population considerations, he said, while noting that the criteria for selecting a site for a nuclear plant had become even tougher post-Fukushima. Talking about Haripur project, he contended that problems arose not only because of local protests but there were doubts even from seismic perspective. "Fukushima set back nuclear power acceptability," he said.