Editorial

Need For a Comprehensive Nuclear Option

India needs to add an additional electricity generation capacity of 75,000-90,000 mega watt in 12th plan by 2017 and another 95,000 to 1,20,000 mega watt by 2022, in order to maintain an 8-9 percent growth rate. The proposition to enhance power generating capacity by installing a series of nuclear power plants should not be clubbed with the need of augmenting the nuclear weapons capacity of the country, as India has renounced its right to use the spent fuel obtained from the civilian use nuclear of view of energy security without clubbing it, with the defence needs.

Still, the nuclear power can be an important option, in view of the cheap generating costs. The long run costs of handling the nuclear waste, decommissioning of the nuclear reactors too need to be taken into consideration and provision for waste handling and decommissioning of the plant towards the end of its life span too be included in the tariff plain.

Moreover, there can be no two opinions about the fact that India is surrounded by two non-friendly nuclear weapon power countries, the China and the Pakistan. It is also true that India had to foreclose its option of any nuclear explosions in future to get access to nuclear power hardware and fuel. Inspite of the fact that our yield of nuclear explosions of 1998 was only 0.05 megaton vis a vis Chinese yield of 4.0 megaton. Our capability to deliver the nuclear war-heads is also relatively very poor vis a vis China. Chinese Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) can carry multiple nuclear war-heads to distances up to 12,000 k.m. while, ours can carry only single war-head, maximum up to 3,000 k.m. which fall in the category of Intermediate Range Missiles (IRMs) only. So, India should continue to negotiate for the status of full nuclear weapon power country like the US, UK, France, Russia and China and also take care of our security needs.

In View of this, India should also explore the option of a comprehensive and indigenous nuclear power programme, capable to cater our nuclear defence needs as well. India has Uranium deposits in Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Meghalaya, and if investment is allocated for mining and enriching the indigenously available Uranium and developing reactors at home, along with procuring string-free hardware and technology from abroad, without subjecting us to external strings, we would feel free to take care of our defence needs too. We are also nearing a breakthrough in Thorium based fast breeder technology. As we have rich Thorium deposits, India should also think for an 'indigenous nuclear power programme', capable to fulfill the nuclear defence needs and also the right to pursue our defence goals.