

Defining Deal

Official communists in India never see the world in black and white because they would like to create colourful myths that do not exist. They think what they say is sacrosanct because they preach a superior ideology. But their political exercise in the real world solely revolves around short-term gains and blatant opportunism while their superior ideological and political myth crumbles at every critical juncture. They tried to enhance their anti-American stance by withdrawing their support to the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government over the controversial Indo-US nuclear deal knowing full well that they won't be in driver's seat in shaping nuclear business which, however, was the core issue in the deal. With the myth of their invincibility vanished in no time they are now in search of routes to get back in the fold. But much depends on Bush. Whether they could sustain their mythical anti-Americanism in the changed context in anybody's guess.

Finally American president George W Bush won the day by making the White House-scripted deal almost operationalised when the 45-member Nuclear Supply Group (NSG) granted a waiver to India allowing it by consensus to participate in global nuclear commerce on September 6, '08. Both the marxist left and the saffron right opposed the deal on identical lines accusing the Congress Party of surrendering India's right to nuclear test. Communists like their saffron counterparts are no less jingoistic. In all fairness their nuclear patriotism or what is dubbed by Congress as 'paranoid patriotism' is a sham. It is losing ground for the simple reason : like the gandhians and saffronites they are equally enthusiastic to have a modern India producing enormous nuclear energy in a situation where peak oil has already arrived. But in the second week of September oil prices slumped in international market close to \$101 their lowest level since the start of April. But they never raised the issue demanding reduction of fuel prices, the main source of inflation, in domestic market.

Also, they deliberately suppress the fact that nuclear power is as dangerous as nuclear weapons. They are not against nuclear weapons even in principle. This deal debate is not about patriotism, it is more about nuclear commerce. Left governments in Bengal and Kerala are looking for nuclear power plants, it does not matter what their party leaders are saying—or not saying.

Interestingly enough, the communist left continues to exhibit their anti-American enthusiasm from their old pro-Soviet policy orientation. But post-Soviet Russia is not opposed to the deal because all nuclear haves stand to gain from India's ambitious plan to set up a chain of reactors along the eastern and south-eastern coast.

Those who are crying themselves hoarse about India's abandonment of right to nuclear test under American pressure fail to explain India's meek surrender to major powers after the Pokhran test in 1974. Troubled by sanctions in international trade and nuclear isolation, India had not option but to declare self-moratorium on nuclear test. India has not been able to test nuclear devices since 1974 despite its refusal to sign Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Deal or no deal, India is going to lose its strategic partnership with America if there is re-run of Pokhran. That it won't go for another test even in the absence of the deal was as axiomatic as anything else. The Bush letter to the American Congress assuring everybody that India would behave according to American dictates, was at worst a kind of formalisation of India's official stand, though covert, in respect of test. Also, the Bush letter that raised a lot of heat without smoke in the marxist camp, was a calculated signal to the all important Vienna conclave of NSG to go ahead with the America-brokered waiver without further delay. And everything worked in accordance with the Bush strategy.

The communist left is now hoping somewhat against hope to see that after the next general election which is not far away, the new government would take steps to terminate 123 agreement. But the next coalition government, centrist or rightist, is unlikely to reverse Indo-American strategic relationship to please the left.

Unless there is sustained campaign against nuclear commerce and nuclear power, the people of India will have to face serious consequences in terms of massive human displacement and ideological disaster. As for the left their anti-American fight over the deal is virtually over. □□□ 14-09-2008