

## US INDIAN NEWS

### Elated Community Hails Indo-US Nuclear Deal

By ASHFAQUE SWAPAN  
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Indian American community leaders were ecstatic following the passage of the U.S.-India nuclear accord in both the U.S. House and Senate which U.S. President George W. Bush has promised to sign into law Oct. 8.

The Senate Oct. 1 voted to overturn a three-decade ban on atomic trade with India. The 86-13 vote gave overwhelming final congressional approval to a landmark U.S.-India nuclear cooperation accord. Earlier at the House of Representatives a week ago, Republicans muscled through the agreement by a vote of 298-117. Once signed by the president, the U.S. and India will have completed a process begun in July 2005.



Most community leaders were overjoyed, although there is a significant minority of activists both in the U.S. and India who have misgivings.

"I am elated that this passed and it was a lot of work," Rajen Anand, chairman of the National Federation of Indian American Organizations, told India-West. "I have been spending, believe it or not, every single moment of my waking day for the last three weeks continuously every single day. I kept writing, I kept going to the Hill."

Anand said he wrote at least 5,000 letters to politicians and lawmakers.

"My particular passion was it would improve U.S.-India relations," he said. "And good India-U.S. relations is good for all of us. We can walk in the streets with our heads held high. This bill had become a symbol of good, close cooperation between the U.S. and India."

Anand, a long-time Democrat who is part of Illinois Democratic Sen. Barack Obama's presidential campaign, said this was one issue that brought together the Democrats and Republicans. "This was the first time that the Indian American community was united because they had a cause and people were very passionate about it."

Niraj Baxi, a Republican and past chairman of NFIA, agreed. "It's not only Democrats and Republicans, everyone who believed in U.S.-India friendship, which is all Indian Americans, all banded together, and they all worked as almost like one team to get the bill passed," Baxi told India-West.

He said it marked a great moment in Indo-U.S. ties. "The U.S. is extending its hand of friendship to India, and I think we Indians are reciprocating," he said. "The U.S. and India have a great relationship ahead, and I think those of us who have worked so hard for so many years — for almost 30 long years — it is at a new high."

Presidential candidates and lawmakers have expressed their support.

In the Senate, Sen. Joe Biden, D-Del., the Democratic vice presidential candidate; Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., the Republican presidential candidate; and Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., the Democratic presidential candidate, all endorsed the agreement.

"I believe that historians would see this as part of the dramatic and positive departure in the U.S.-India relationship," Biden said. "The approval of this agreement would help both countries to keep moving on the path of cooperation for a better world." Biden leads the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee.

Bush hailed the passage of the bill. "I congratulate the Senate on passing the United States-India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Nonproliferation Enhancement Act," he said in a statement. "This legislation will strengthen our global nuclear nonproliferation efforts, protect the environment, create jobs, and assist India in meeting its growing energy needs in a responsible manner."

At a celebratory meeting in the State Department Oct. 2, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice praised the accord. "It is indeed an historic agreement," she said. "It is an agreement that cements an effort that we have been making for some time to bring together the world's largest democracy with the world's oldest continuous democracy. And we believe that the relationship between the United States and India is on a very firm

footing."

Rep. Ed Royce, R-Calif., who has been a key supporter of the accord in the House, expressed his pleasure Oct. 1. "Today's vote caps a long, history-making process. U.S. relations with India, which will be a major 21st century power, are cemented. We will be true partners as we enter into an ever challenging world; which includes the decades-long struggle against Islamist terrorism," he said.

"Indian Prime Minister Singh deserves credit for putting his government on the line, and beating back opposition from those who sought to disrupt U.S.-India relations. Today, Congress repaid the prime minister's bet."

To be sure, there are opponents to the accord, both in India and the U.S.

"As someone interested in peace in South Asia and a clean environment, I am saddened," Ramkumar Sridharan, an activist with Friends of South Asia, a Bay Area-based South Asian group, told India-West. "India has massive energy needs, but . . . nuclear energy is neither clean nor green. The problem of nuclear waste disposal is still unsolved and mounting. . . Nuclear energy is extremely cost-ineffective compared to traditional sources of energy."

M.V. Ramana, a nuclear policy analyst associated with the Bangalore-based Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Environment and Development, said he understands Indian American satisfaction, but he warns that there are disturbing issues underlying the accord.

"(It) is an agreement which . . . suggests that U.S. is beginning to value India as a strategic partner and that is something that a lot of people here seem to think is a good thing," Ramana told India-West.

"Now if you look at who it is in the U.S. who are pushing for this, it's the Bush administration, which has had a terrible foreign policy record, and they are the people who are your big supporters. So tomorrow, if there is something else like Iraq, or Syria, or Iran, for that matter, they want India to be in the coalition of the willing. . . They are going to extract their pound of flesh."

Ramana also argues that nuclear power doesn't make much sense for India. "These are all going to be very expensive projects which are going to cost the Indian taxpayer, the Indian electricity consumer, huge amounts of money. It's going to be Enron all over again," he said, referring to the former U.S. power giant's debacle in Dabhol, Maharashtra.

India's record of running nuclear reactors, both in terms of cost efficiency and in terms of accountability, is terrible, he said.

Princeton-based policy analyst Zia Mian expressed misgivings about the accord's damage to international relations.

"The U.S. has already demonstrated to the world that what was seen as the founding principle of international foreign policy for 30 years has been overturned quickly when U.S. strategic interests require," Mian, a research scientist with the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, told India-West.

"The larger principle that international agreements and institutions and norms and behaviors that other countries commit themselves to because they think they are doing it together, those are now all open for question. Because today it is India and the NSG. Tomorrow who knows what the United States may decide it wants to change?"

"What does it mean to have rules anymore? . . . This is part of the larger dismantling that the Bush administration has done."

That said, the mood in the Indian American community is overwhelmingly jubilant. Statements of congratulations have been pouring into the offices of India-West.

In a statement, NFIA thanked Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn.; Sen. Richard Lugar, D-Ind.; and Rep. Howard Berman, D-Calif., in getting this bill approved by both the House and the Senate.

"We especially thank President Bush and Secretary Rice for their untiring efforts in getting the final approval of this important agreement and congratulate Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for his perseverance in getting this deal approved," said Chandu Patel, president-elect of the NFIA.

In a separate statement, the Asian American Hotel Owners Association commended the U.S. Congress for its "historic approval ."

"The momentous passage . . . will allow India to join the international nuclear non-proliferation mainstream and achieve energy security," the statement said.

"For the past several years, AAHOA leaders have actively promoted the approval of the 123 Agreement by participating in many high-level meetings and conference calls with the White House and representatives from the Department of State."

AAHOA chairman Ashwin "Ash" Patel said: "As Indian Americans, we are celebrating this significant occasion because it will have a lasting and far-reaching impact on the future of our great countries."

The U.S.-India Political Action Committee applauded passage of the bill and USINPAC leader Sunil Puri, who has closely worked on the issue with Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said, "We worked hard to ensure the passage of this agreement for past three years; it is great to see the fruition of our tireless efforts."

The U.S.-India Friendship Council "looks forward to the White House signing ceremony heralding a new era in U.S.-India relations," it said in a statement.

Council founder Swadesh Chatterjee said: "This is the most historic political moment for the Indian American community. The passage of the nuclear deal by the United States Congress will signal a new strategic partnership between the United States and India that will define the 21st century. I, like many in the U.S.-India Friendship Council, have been working towards this day for the last two decades."

The Indian American Republican Council issued a congratulatory statement. "Final passage in the Senate secures a much-deserved foreign policy victory for President George W. Bush," said IARC spokesman Dino Teppara. "Along with the architect of this agreement Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. . . Bush has fundamentally altered the landscape of Asia for years to come. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with his statesmanlike leadership has taken U.S.-India bilateral relations to new heights."

In separate statements, the Sikh Council on Religion and Education and the Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations in North America welcomed the passage of the bill, as did Dr. Sampat Shivangi, senior vice president of the Indian American Forum.

Community activists told India-West the passage of the bill meant a lot more to them than just an agreement.

"We've worked hard in this country to build U.S.-India friendship because we feel strongly that the roots that we have and the country of our adoption, both are so similar, why can't they be friends? When they become the close friends as they are now, we feel that the whole family is getting together," said NFIA past chairman Niraj Baxi. "It's a family of democracies getting together. That's why we feel so excited. Instinctively or intuitively we feel something good happening."

For NFIA chairman Rajen Anand, it's a triumphant change of circumstances after decades of disappointment.

"I have lived here for 45 years now, and I have seen great, great transformation in the relationship," he said of flourishing Indo-U.S. ties. "In the '60s and '70s nobody cared about India. Nobody bothered about India. But now when we go to some Congressman or Senator, they always praise India. . . . This is a very, very big change, and I think the community should build on that kind of clout."

He said there was a lesson for the community here. "The lesson we have learned is, number one, if you work together, you can really accomplish a lot, move mountains," he said. "We should learn that if you have an issue on which you all agree, you can really move mountains. Whether you are Democrat, Republican, Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, you are Indian."