

American

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U.S.-India Nuclear Pact Will Create Jobs, Clean Energy

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — A final agreement between the United States and India to permit India to reprocess spent nuclear fuel will create jobs in both nations and move India closer to providing affordable energy for all its citizens, officials say.

“The United States and India have taken an important step toward implementing civil nuclear cooperation by completing negotiations on ‘arrangements and procedures’ for reprocessing U.S.-origin spent nuclear fuel,” the State Department said in announcing the conclusion of negotiations March 29 in Washington.

The reprocessing arrangement was negotiated under the 2008 U.S.-India nuclear initiative, known as a 123 Agreement. India will be able to reprocess U.S.-originated nuclear material under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. Completion of these arrangements will ease participation by U.S. firms in India’s civil nuclear energy sector, estimated to be worth approximately \$150 billion.

“Everything is moving forward. It was a very successful negotiation, a very successful agreement with a very significant partner of the United States,” Under Secretary of State Ellen Tauscher said in a State Department briefing March 29.

Timothy Roemer, U.S. ambassador to India, called the final accord “part of the great, win-win narrative of the U.S.-India global partnership.”

“These arrangements will help open the door for U.S. firms in India’s rapidly expanding energy sector, creating thousands of jobs for the citizens of both our countries,” Roemer added in a statement from New Delhi. “The United States and India are one step closer to ensuring greater access to clean and affordable energy and electricity for all Indians, particularly those most in need.”

Roemer said Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh shares President Obama’s vision of a world free of nuclear weapons. “We applaud India’s outstanding track record on nonproliferation issues, and we look forward to our continuing cooperation in this area,” he said.

The announcement was made about two weeks before leaders from 44 nations meet in Washington for the Global Nuclear Security Summit spearheaded by Obama as part of his efforts to move the world away from nuclear arms.

2008 NUCLEAR INITIATIVE

The October 2008 agreement gave India access to the world market for nuclear fuel and technology after a 33-year international freeze imposed in the wake of its first nuclear weapons test in 1974 and its subsequent refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The agreement, along with the U.S.-supported lifting of a parallel ban imposed by the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group, furthered a key strategic, clean energy, environmental and commercial goal of the United States and represented nearly a decade of intensive diplomacy by the administrations of Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

India imports 75 percent of its oil, and Singh has argued that India needs a stronger investment in nuclear energy generation. India has four operating nuclear power reactors under IAEA safeguards. Under the U.S.-India accord, India is committed to separate its military and civilian activities and submit its entire civil program to international inspection.

Also under the 2008 agreement, India will place under voluntary safeguards a majority of its existing and planned nuclear power reactors — 14 of 22 — and all of its future civil reactors. Within a generation, it is estimated that nearly 90 percent of India’s reactors will be under IAEA safeguards.

The 2008 agreement, under which the March 29 agreement was reached, will remain in force for 40 years, and will continue in force for additional periods of 10 years unless either country gives notice to terminate it six months before the end of a period. The agreement can be terminated before its expiration on a year’s written notice.

U.S. Strategy Expands Tuberculosis Treatment, Control

Goals include faster TB detection, more HIV tests, stronger health systems

By Cheryl Pellerin
Science Writer

Washington — On World Tuberculosis Day, March 24, the United States released a five-year strategy for dealing with the ancient and relentless contagious lung disease that sickens 9 million people a year and kills nearly 5,000 every day in some of the world’s poorest nations.

The strategy, called for by the 2008 Lantos-Hyde Leadership Act Against AIDS, TB and Malaria, details the government’s plans from 2009 to 2014 to address the global public health threat of TB, including multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) and extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB), forms of the disease that threaten to

undermine recent progress in controlling TB.

“As part of the President’s Global Health Initiative we are accelerating our programs to control TB,” Dr. Rajiv Shah, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), said in a video March 24 as he released the strategy.

“Working with our many partners,” he said, “we believe it will be possible to halve the number of TB cases and deaths by 2015. In doing so, 14 million lives could be saved.” The plan lays the groundwork for detecting and treating TB in 2.6 million people and 57,200 MDR patients.

“This is our blueprint for expanded treatment and control over the next five years,” Shah said. “We will work in close partnerships with host nations to implement this strategy.”

DEADLY CONTAGION

One-third of the planet’s population is infected with TB, which can be deadly if it becomes active in the body and is left untreated. The immune system can keep TB bacteria under control after a person becomes infected, but bacteria can become active when something – a medical condition such as HIV, for example – reduces a person’s immunity.

People in almost every country are infected with TB, but 22 countries account for 80 percent of the TB cases. The countries, in order, are India, China, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Philippines, Democratic Republic of Congo, Russia, Vietnam, Kenya, Brazil, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Thailand, Mozambique, Burma, Cambodia and Afghanistan.

TB is treated with a six- to nine-month course of “first-line” (most effective) drugs that cost less than \$20. If patients do not complete the drug course or are treated improperly, they can develop MDR-TB. These patients must be treated with more expensive, less effective second-line drugs for 18 to 24 months.

If patients do not complete this course or are treated with the wrong drugs, they can develop XDR-TB, whose bacteria strains are resistant to all TB drugs. Fewer than 30 percent of XDR-TB patients who are otherwise healthy and whose immune systems are not compromised can be cured. More than half of those with XDR-TB die within five years of diagnosis.

“But there’s good news too,” Shah said. “TB is curable. Saving lives is simply a matter of early detection and appropriate treatment.”

KEY INTERVENTIONS

TB is ancient and so are many of the tools still used to fight it. The main diagnostic test, using a microscope, was developed 125 years ago, the TB vaccine 80 years ago and drug treatments 40 years ago. Innovation in diagnostics, drugs and vaccines is a focus of the U.S. strategy, and so is strengthening national health care systems.

One tool has been the introduction of kits containing all of the drugs a patient needs to complete a six-month course of treatment. This has helped simplify treatment and saved hundreds of thousands of lives. And the World Health Organization has already endorsed tests to more rapidly diagnose drug-resistant TB.

“We are working with the private sector to develop new drugs that could shorten TB treatment from the current six-month recommendation to four months or even less,” Shah said. “That would make it easier and cheaper to help solve TB in patients who have the illness.”

MOST BURDENED COUNTRIES

In the most burdened countries, U.S. assistance has helped control and treat TB. USAID assistance in Russia, for example, began in 1998 to help the government reduce TB illness and implement DOTS – directly observed treatment-short course – the internationally recommended strategy for TB control. Through its partners, USAID has expanded DOTS in Russia, helped the Ministry of Health and Social Development incorporate routine TB control into the health system, and trained health workers in internationally recognized TB diagnostics.

In East Africa, USAID is building the capacity of regional institutions to deal with TB and since 2002 has sought African partners to improve DOTS programs. USAID is working with the Regional Centre for Quality of Health Care in Uganda to bolster health worker skills, and provides technical assistance to help countries improve community-based DOTS, increase public-private partnerships and support TB-HIV/AIDS activities. Regional funds support the Uganda center’s pediatric TB treatment.

In Pakistan, USAID works with the World Health Organization and the National TB Control Program to expand DOTS and strengthen TB control at the provincial and district levels.

The USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia supports TB activities in Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The approach is to expand DOTS, increase access to medications, better manage MDR-TB and XDR-

TB, address those with TB-HIV/AIDS and develop new tools and approaches.

Teaching India's Poorest, and Herself

Profile of a delegate to the Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship

By Andrzej Zwaniacki
Staff Writer

Washington — A Mumbai slum was an exotic place to 18-year-old Shaheen Mistri when she walked into it in 1989 as part of a college project. Born into an upper-middle-class Indian family, she spent most of her early youth overseas studying at private schools and colleges. She was not naïve: she knew about inequalities in India's education system. But what she saw — bright kids full of potential living in terrible squalor — shocked her.

Within a few days, she found a small space in a private home in a shantytown and began teaching a small group of children of different ages. She didn't speak the same language, but it was the least of the obstacles she faced. There was no money for pens. Children were not interested. Parents didn't trust her. And potential sponsors couldn't understand why she wanted to bring these poor children into private schools. But Mistri couldn't be deterred from teaching. She was able to move into her first real classroom when the Catholic Holy Name School gave her space, after 20 others had rejected her pleas to host her group.

"If you have a lot of drive and determination, nothing seems formidable or challenging," Mistri said. But, she added, even after she had a classroom, she had no idea what might come of her effort to teach kids from the slum.

What has become of it is the Akanksha Foundation, a nonprofit education project that provides after-school tutoring to disadvantaged children at more than 60 centers and formal education at six schools. The centers and schools are in Mumbai and Pune. Volunteers, mostly college students, teach close to 5,000 children using an innovative methodology, which won the foundation international honors. Akanksha means "aspiration" in Hindi. Fittingly, Akanksha alumni go to colleges or vocational schools. Some stay with the organization as teaching fellows. One, Sumeet, has become an MTV India celebrity.

As the recognition of Akanksha and Mistri herself grew and success stories piled on, she had a nagging sense of disparity between the magnitude of problems that plague India's education system and the contribution her organization could make to solve them. But she saw an opportunity to expand her reach and work for more

transformative changes when she met Wendy Kopp, the founder of Teach for America. The U.S. program recruits and trains outstanding recent college graduates, who commit to teach for two years in U.S. public schools.

The challenge of transplanting the concept to a system as complex and diverse as India's (eight languages are accepted for school instruction) is tremendous. But Mistri and her associates working for educational reform forged ahead unfazed. They launched Teach for India in 2007, after which the organization recruited around 240 teaching fellows and wooed Goldman Sachs and Citigroup and major Indian corporations as sponsors. Mistri hopes the nonprofit will grow into a national movement, which eventually will bring about educational reform.

"When I started it was basically an attempt to learn about myself," she reflected. Today, she is a successful advocate for better education. She has learned much, she says, over the past 20 years, particularly about children's emotional generosity, perseverance and courage.

Mistri will be participating in the Presidential Summit on Entrepreneurship April 26-27 in Washington.

Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams On Agricultural Programs

Transcript of comments from Aaron Williams

Peace Corps agriculture volunteers work with small farmers in developing countries to increase food production while promoting environmental conservation practices.

Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams:

We want to be part of Secretary Clinton's new food security initiative. As you know, Peace Corps historically has always been actively involved — it was one of the key areas that were launched by Sargent Shriver. We had wonderful partnerships in those days with the land-grant universities, both in terms of places where we recruited volunteers, places where we recruited faculty and where we trained volunteers.

And so, I think it's important, as we move forward and develop a robust food security initiative at Peace Corps, that we look to renew those kinds of partnerships as part of my strategy. But at the same time, there are other ways for us to incorporate American universities that can play an important role in helping strengthen our food security initiative.

So we want to make sure that we have a good, strong robust food security initiative. We're going to try to target Americans who are trained in agricultural sciences to

come into the Peace Corps as volunteers. As I travel around and talk to the leaders of countries where we have Peace Corps programs and where we hope to have Peace Corps programs, food security will be one of the topics that I'll be raising with them.

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