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Title : Statement regarding India's vote on the Iran Nuclear Issue.

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Speaker, Sir and hon. Members, taking into account the concerns that have been raised about India's vote on the Iran nuclear issue at the meeting of the Governing Board of the International Atomic Energy in Vienna, on February 5, 2006, I rise to apprise this august House of the facts of this matter.

Let me begin by affirming that India's vote on the IAEA resolution does not, in any way, detract from the traditionally close and friendly relations we are privileged to enjoy with Iran. Indeed, India-Iran ties, as we have repeatedly emphasized, are civilizational in nature. We intend to further strengthen and expand our multifaceted ties with Iran to mutual benefit.

Let me also state that the importance of India's relations with Iran is not limited to any single issue or aspect. This relationship is important across a wide expanse of co-operation, both bilateral and multilateral. We also co-operate on regional issues. We value this relationship and intend to do what we can to nurture our bilateral ties. Let me reiterate in this context that we are committed to the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. The economics of this project is currently under professional investigation by internationally reputed consultants. This is a necessary step in taking the pipeline project forward.

On the specific issue of Iran's nuclear programme, let me reiterate what I have said publicly on several occasions. As a signatory to the NPT, Iran has the legal right to develop peaceful uses of nuclear energy consistent with its international commitments and obligations. It is incumbent upon Iran to exercise

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these rights in the context of safeguards that it has voluntarily accepted upon its nuclear programme under the IAEA[snb25].

These rights [bru26]and obligations must also be seen in the context of developments since 2003, when the International Atomic Energy Agency began seeking answers to a number of questions arising from Iran's nuclear activities, some of which were undeclared to the International Atomic Energy Agency in previous years. Subsequently, in the context of these demands, Iran did extend cooperation to the International Atomic Energy Agency in investigations of its some of these activities.

In November 2004, Iran agreed with the European Union-3 (France, Germany and the UK) to voluntarily suspend all enrichment and reprocessing activities until questions relating to its past nuclear activities were clarified by the International Atomic Energy Agency. However, since August last year, Iran has renewed production of uranium hexafluoride and thereafter, has also resumed uranium enrichment.

Successive reports of the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency have noted that while Iran's cooperation has resulted in clarifying a number of questions, there remain many unresolved questions on key issues. Sir, these include the use of centrifuges imported from third countries and designs relating to fabrication of metallic hemispheres. Hon. Members are aware that the source of such clandestine proliferation of sensitive technologies lies in our own neighbourhood, details of which have emerged from successive International Atomic Energy Agency reports. This august House, Sir, I believe, will agree that India cannot afford to turn a blind eye to security implications of such proliferation activities.

The objectives of upholding Iran's rights and obligations and our security concerns arising from proliferation activities in our extended neighbourhood have shaped our position. Therefore, Sir, our approach has been consistently in favour of promoting all efforts to find a solution, based on acceptable mutual compromises, in which Iran's interests and the concerns of the international community would be addressed. We have consistently worked to promote a consensus in the International Atomic Energy Agency towards this end. This has been the logic of our stand at the IAEA Board of Governors Meetings both in September, 2005 and earlier this month.

Sir, I might remind hon. Members that it is only on these two occasions that the Resolution that resulted has not been a consensus one, and a vote has been necessary. Despite that, in the latest vote this month, the Resolution not only had the support of all P-5 countries including Russia and China, but also of important NAM and developing countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, Ghana, Singapore, Yemen and Sri Lanka.

The resolutions passed in September last year and earlier this month underlined the need for time to be given for diplomatic efforts to

continue. The recent resolution of February 5 asks the Director General of International Atomic Energy Agency to inform the UN Security Council of the status of negotiations with Iran, and the steps that Iran needs to take to address these questions. It calls for continued diplomatic efforts including through exploration of the option provided by Russia, which we have supported. Hon. Members are aware that Russia had offered to locate a joint venture project on Russian soil to address Iranian needs for enriched uranium, provided Iran suspends its enrichment programme to increase international confidence regarding the unresolved questions of the last two decades[bru27]. Russia and Iran are currently in discussions on the subject, and we remain hopeful of a positive outcome. It is our hope and belief that the issues that have arisen can still be resolved through discussion and dialogue.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I have set out the background in which we have taken a position at the International Atomic Energy Agency Board. I would like to reiterate our unshakeable conviction that such a sensitive issue, which concerns the rights and international obligations of a sovereign nation and a proud people can only be addressed through calm, reasoned diplomacy and the willingness on all sides to eschew confrontation and seek acceptable compromise solutions. We are, therefore, deeply concerned by escalating rhetoric and growing tensions and the possibility of a confrontation over this issue. This is a matter of concern for us as tensions in this region -- where our vital political, economic and security interests are involved -- affect us directly. The region hosts 3.5 million Indian citizens whose welfare is a major concern of our Government.

We, therefore, call upon all concerned to exercise restraint, demonstrate flexibility and continue with dialogue, to reach an amicable solution. As I mentioned, there will be another meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency Board in March this year at which a full and regular report will be presented by the International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General. In the days to come, we will support diplomatic efforts in this regard, drawing upon our friendly relations with all the key countries involved.

The Government is conscious of the need to balance several important considerations in this regard. We have a strong and valuable relationship with Iran which we would like to take forward in a manner that is mutually beneficial. We have great respect and admiration for the Iranian people with whom our fraternal ties go back to several millennia. We have every intention of ensuring that no shadow is cast on these bonds.

In the overall context that I have outlined in detail, I am confident that this august House will agree that the stance taken by this Government has been consistent and in keeping with our own well considered and independent judgement of our national interests. I am confident that this policy will receive the support of this august House and our nation. ...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL (HOOGHLY): Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hon. Prime Minister's statement has concealed more than it has revealed. It has not mentioned anything about the pressures being mounted and about the public statement made by important people of the US Administration on this issue.

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