

India Strengthens Its Nuclear Power Plans With New US Agreement

India has an ambitious nuclear project plan that has long been based on the investment of its thorium stock, estimated at between 300,000 and 850,000 tons—the world's largest stockpile. However, it has entered into agreements with several countries in recent years to strengthen its international presence in field of nuclear energy, the latest of which was the agreement signed yesterday with the US to strengthen cooperation in nuclear energy and security, and to establish six US nuclear power plants in India.

The deal came after two days of talks in Washington. Under the Trump administration, the US is looking to sell more energy products to India, the world's largest oil buyer.

According to Ratan Kumar Sinha, who succeeded Banjeri as head of the Indian Nuclear Energy Administration until 2015, India has been able to move faster since it signed a civilian nuclear agreement with the US in 2008. But since India developed water reactors, the second stage of the agreement was not completed. As such, the experimental generation reactor, which began operations in 1985, did not reach its assumed capacity of 40 megawatts.

India's adoption of thorium is down to its historical and geographic conditions. India's scientists have a long-term strategy to gain access to carbon-free energy in a country that is expected to have a population of 1.7 billion by 2060.

After nearly a decade of talks, France decided last year to start work on what could become the world's largest nuclear power plant in India. French President, Emmanuel Makron, and Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Moody, urged French and Indian energy companies to speed up discussions on the contract and start working on the site in Jaipur, Maharashtra state, by December 2019. The project is expected to be the world's largest nuclear power plant, with a total capacity of 9.6 gigawatts.

In 2017, the ASE Group announced that Russia and India had signed agreements to design and supply the third stage of the Kudankulam nuclear power station in India. Russia is building the Kudankulam hydroelectric plant in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu under government agreements made in 1988 and 1998. The construction of units at Kudankulam, the fifth and sixth stations, will begin after Russia supplies essential Russian-made equipment to assemble the third stage of the plant.

India's nuclear power capacity is 6.8 gigawatts, or about 2% of the country's total capacity. There are 20 nuclear reactors, but the country's Nuclear Liability Act offers reactor suppliers compensation for any damages that may occur during work. This complicates India's plans to expand its nuclear capacity by more than nine times by 2023.

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