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Uranium Supply From Australia to India

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Why in News

Recently, the **Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)** has turned down the offers submitted by the two Australian companies for commencing supply of uranium ore to India citing lack of viability of the proposals.

Key Points

- **India-Australia** ties have been on an upswing since 2012, when the **Australian government decided to sell uranium to India** despite India not being a signatory to the nuclear **Non Proliferation Treaty**.
- The above decision was **formalised by way of a bilateral agreement in 2014** known as **Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy**.
- The uranium imports from Australia **were to be used to meet fuel requirements of Indian nuclear reactors** that are under **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** safeguards.
- However, the **progress on uranium supply has been very low**, despite efforts from both sides. In 2017, Australia had sent its first uranium shipment to India but that was cited as “a small sample of uranium” transferred “purely for testing purposes”.

India's Civil Nuclear Capacity

- India has **22 reactors** with an **installed capacity of 6,780 megawatt**. Of these, **eight reactors are fuelled by indigenous uranium** while the remaining **14 are under IAEA safeguards** and qualify to use imported uranium.
- India was required to bring 14 reactors under IAEA safeguards in a phased manner under the **separation plan** announced by India in 2006, which was negotiated after the 2005 nuclear deal with the USA.

- Currently, India imports uranium fuel from **Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, France and Canada.**

Kazakhstan is the world's largest producer of uranium.

- A steady supply of uranium is expected to boost the performance of Indian nuclear power plants, as well as of several fuel cycle facilities.

Non-Proliferation Treaty

- The NPT is an **international treaty** whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to foster the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of disarmament.
- The treaty was signed in **1968** and entered into force in 1970. Presently, it has 190 member states.
- It **requires countries to give up any present or future plans to build nuclear weapons** in return for access to peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
- It represents the **only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty** to the goal of disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States.

Nuclear-weapon states parties under the NPT are defined as those that manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive devices before 1st January 1967.

India's Stand on NPT

- India is **one of the five countries that have not signed the NPT**, the others include **Pakistan, Israel, North Korea, and South Sudan.**
- India always considered the NPT as discriminatory and had refused to sign it.
- India has opposed the international treaties aimed at non-proliferation since they were selectively applicable to the non-nuclear powers and legitimised the monopoly of the five nuclear weapons powers.
- India believes that nuclear **disarmament can be achieved through a step-by-step process** underwritten by a **universal commitment** and an **agreed multilateral framework** after meaningful dialogues among all States possessing nuclear weapons, for building trust and confidence.

Way Forward

- The India-Australia bilateral relationship has been largely a case of "**one step forward, two steps back**". However, Australia's overturning of a ban on uranium sales to India was **seen as a removal of a diplomatic thorn** between the two nations and potentially opening up a new and growing market for Australian suppliers.
- In June 2020, India and Australia had decided to elevate their relationship to a **'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership'**.

- In view of the above development both India and Australia can work to remove the obstacles in supplying Uranium from Australia to India.

Source: IE