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Enhancing uranium output a major challenge: Kakodkar

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) Chairman Anil Kakodkar on Tuesday said India was faced with the serious challenge of enhancing uranium production. This challenge would have to be met with correct policy prescriptions and integration of different mineral processing technologies.

He was inaugurating a three-day international seminar on "Mineral Processing Technology" (MPT 2008) here.

Dr. Kakodkar said the AEC was taking up projects declared unviable earlier and putting them on stream using new processes and integrating existing processes. "Clearly there are issues that are related to the environment and cost of inputs. The solution lies partly in technology and partly in an integrated approach," he said.

He said liberalisation of the policy regime governing mineral exploration in the country had helped only in enhancing export of minerals without any significant value addition. Recently, the Government of India liberalised the policy in the mining sector further and this should help bring in new players and encourage integrated use of new process technologies that would serve the cause of value addition with the least impact on the environment.

He said two new mines for uranium production were under commissioning trials and would be on stream shortly.

A uranium project had been launched in Andhra Pradesh.

"These were projects which were declared unviable earlier. We have put some new processes to use in them. Given the right research and development and correct policy prescriptions, we will be able to overcome the challenges," he said and cited the new plants coming up in Kerala and Orissa as potential initiatives that could help in the value addition process.

He stressed the need for human resource development in the area of mineral exploration and exploitation and the solution to this challenge could be met by widening the net to gather as many young people as possible. The interior parts of India had a rich human resource base. Many young people in the interior parts were brighter than those who entered elite institutions. Whenever we asked them why they did not go to the IITs and other such institutions, their answer was that they could not afford it. "Our strength as a country is our young people. It is only a question of looking beyond the traditional area of coverage," Dr. Kakodkar said.

The seminar, being organised jointly by the Indian Institute of Mineral Engineers (IIME), Jamshedpur, the National Institute for Inter-disciplinary Science and Technology (NIIST), Thiruvananthapuram, and the Ashapura Group, Mumbai, is focusing on mineral/coal characterisation and processing, process modelling, simulation and control, environmental issues and waste treatment, management and recycling.

It is being attended by mineral processing experts from the U.S., Sweden, Korea, Australia, Turkey, China and Japan and from different institutions in India.