

India suffers blow as US, Russia, China oppose UNSC reform talks

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United Nations: In a setback to India's bid for a permanent seat in an expanded UN Security Council, the US, along with Russia and China, has opposed negotiations to reform the powerful UN body, refusing to contribute to a text that will form the basis for the long-drawn reform process.

UN General Assembly President Sam Kutesa achieved a breakthrough of sorts by circulating a text to UN members that will form the basis for the negotiations on the reform of the Security Council.

Kutesa had appointed Jamaica's Permanent Representative Courtenay Rattray to chair on his behalf the Intergovernmental Negotiations on Security Council Reform.

Kutesa, in a letter dated July 31 to all UN members, said he is also circulating letters containing the positions of groups and Member States that indicated they did not wish their proposals to be included in the body of the negotiating text.

These countries include US, Russia and China.

American Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power said in her letter to Kutesa that the US is "open in principle" to a "modest" expansion of both permanent and non-permanent members but the condition that "any consideration of an expansion of permanent members must take into account the ability and willingness of countries to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the other purposes of the United Nations."

Power added that "we believe that consideration of new permanent members must be country-specific in nature." She also reiterated that the US remains opposed to "any alteration or expansion of the veto."

Sources told PTI that the US opposition to aspects of the reform process can be perceived as a "duplicitous" since President Barack Obama has reaffirmed his support for a reformed UN Security Council with India as a permanent member.

Russia, which has also supported India's candidacy as permanent member, said in its letter to Kutesa that the "prerogatives of the current Permanent Members of the Security Council, including the use of the veto, should remain intact under any variant of the Council reform."

"The intergovernmental negotiations on the UN Security Council reform should proceed in a calm, transparent and inclusive atmosphere free from artificial deadlines," he said.

India has maintained that the process to expand the powerful UN body "cannot be seen to be an exercise ad infinitum" and a results-based timeline is crucial to achieve a concrete outcome.

"Those who ask for not imposing artificial timelines may be advised to desist from inflicting artificial delays on this process," India's Ambassador to the UN Asoke Kumar Mukerji has said in the past.

Sources said that India feels that the 70th anniversary of the UN, being commemorated this year, is an appropriate milestone to propel the reform process, which should be completed within the next one year.

Russia said that in the situation when positions of the main groups of states - those who support the idea of the UN

Security Council's expansion in both categories and those who do not - remain polar, one can advance in the negotiating process only by searching for a compromise.

It said that while it supports broader representation of the developing countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America on a reformed Security Council, it is important to maintain compact composition of the Council in order for it to provide an adequate and prompt reaction to new challenges.

"The number of members in an enlarged UNSC should not exceed a reasonable level of low twenties," it added.

On improvement of the working methods of the Security Council, Russia said the leading role in this process should belong to the Security Council itself as the "only legitimate master of its own procedures and working methods."

China said UNSC reform is "multifaceted", covering not only issues such as enlarging the Council's membership and strengthening representation, but also increasing efficiency and improving working methods.

It added that Member States are still seriously divided on the Security Council reform and no general agreement has been reached on any solution so far.

UNSC reform should not be carried out at the expense of the unity of Member States.

All member States should remain committed to the intergovernmental negotiations process, adopt a flexible and pragmatic attitude, gradually build mutual trust and meet each other halfway.

No solution on which Member States are seriously divided or approach that may cause division among Member States will have China's Support," it said.

"Member states still need to engage in patient consultations to find a solution that accommodates each other's interests and concerns," it said, a position different from that of India which has stressed that the 2015 "is a year for decisive action" and for it, another round of the IGN with business like the earlier rounds would "not be acceptable."

India has said it would then find it very difficult to meaningfully engage with the process.

China also stressed that new seats of the Security Council should be reasonably distributed. It also noted that any solution or reform model should enjoy general consensus.

"The five clusters of key issues concerning Security Council reform are interrelated, and should not be addressed in isolation of each other.

It is imperative to stick to the approach of a package solution.

The "piecemeal" or "step-by-step" approach is not conducive to accommodating the interests and concerns of Member States," China said.

India has received support from France and the UK, the two remaining permanent members of Security Council.

The two nations along with Kazakhstan and Romania have specifically named in the negotiating text Brazil, Germany, India, Japan and an African representation to be included among the permanent members of a reformed UNSC.

- PTI