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Final Edition**SECTION:** A Section; A12**LENGTH:** 650 words**HEADLINE:** U.S. Approves Visa for Indian Scientist**BYLINE:** Shankar Vedantam, Washington Post Staff Writer**BODY:**

State Department officials said yesterday that the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi has granted a visa to a prominent Indian scientist who said he was accused of deception and potential links to chemical weapons production when he applied to a U.S. consulate.

Goverdhan Mehta said he was told two weeks ago that his visa had been "refused" and that his expertise in chemistry could be a threat to U.S. national security. The case caused a furor in India just days before a visit by President Bush next week that is aimed at building warmer ties between the world's two largest democracies.

Reached at his home, however, Mehta said that he had already canceled his travel plans and declined a visiting professorship at the University of Florida in Gainesville. He said the issuance of a visa will not change his decision.

"The issues are much more than giving me a visa," said Mehta, who is the president of the International Council for Science, whose members are the national scientific academies of many countries. "Humiliating experience apart, even the thought I could be denied a visa — I could not have imagined it."

In a statement, the International Council for Science expressed "grave concern at the hostile treatment" of Mehta at the U.S. Consulate in Madras. "It clearly illustrates that, despite some progress, all is far from well with regards to the visa policies and associated practices for scientists wishing to enter the USA," the organization said.

State Department officials maintained that although Mehta was given a form letter saying "you have been refused a visa," it was not a rejection but rather part of a conditional process aimed at obtaining additional information.

Mehta declined to provide the additional information, which U.S. officials say is required by law. He said he told consular officials to check his Web site if they wished to learn about his scientific work. Officials declined to comment on where the information to approve the visa came from, saying that such details are confidential.

Consular officials have to refer visa applications of scientists with certain kinds of expertise to Washington for review by qualified experts, Adam Ereli, a State Department spokesman, said yesterday. He said the review of Mehta's application had been completed and that a visa had been approved.

"We try to treat everybody fairly. We certainly think we did so in this case, frankly. And we look forward to him having a good trip to the United States," Ereli said.

Tony Edson, deputy assistant secretary for visa services, said the review is designed to reduce the risk that foreign experts could come to the United States, learn about sensitive technology and take the information with them. Most reviews result in a visa being issued, he said, and the department has greatly accelerated them.

Edson acknowledged that many visa seekers have a very different impression of the application process, a difference that he said could be partly traced to the crush of applications from countries such as India.

Mehta and another Indian scientist, P.C. Kesavan, a Madras geneticist specializing in radiation biology who was also refused a visa unless he provided detailed information about his background and the potential applications of his work,

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said senior scientists have better things to do with their time.

"I feel humiliated about the whole process," said Kesavan, who charged that officials in the Madras consulate were high-handed, indifferent or rude. "If this is the case, I am not so keen on coming to your country."

Wendy White, an official with the National Academy of Sciences, said targeting scientists based merely on their areas of expertise could make it harder to spot real threats. "If you are looking for the needle in the haystack, you have made the haystack bigger," she said. "The question we need to ask is 'Are we more secure?' "

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