

The Best Way to Solve N. Korean Nuclear Issue: "Dialogue and Consultation Among All Parties Concerned"

Indian EAM Singh

Question: External Affairs Minister (EAM) K. Natwar Singh, what did you discuss with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice?

Answer: I had very positive and productive discussions with Secretary Rice. We looked at our relationship not only for what it offers today but at its enormous potential to shape the global future. Our endeavour was to give more substance to our emerging strategic partnership and take the levels of cooperation to a higher plane.

We addressed the political, economic, technological and security aspects of that partnership. This includes more high technology trade, expanded defence cooperation, a serious energy dialogue in all its dimensions and steps to improve economic, trade and communication links between us. We also exchanged views on important regional and global issues, among them the reform of the United Nations.

Q: Would you explain about relations between India and the United States?

A: Our relations with the United States have been warm and friendly. There is great goodwill at the popular level. If the full promise of the relationship was not realised in the past, it was due to a lack of appreciation of our aspirations and spirit of independence. Fortunately, that era is behind us. Today, we not only share values but have a strong convergence of interests. The remarkable economic performance over the last decade and a half has brought India strongly into American economic consciousness.

The image of India in the United States has undergone a change as a result of the association with information technology. Our achievements as a democracy and the sense of responsibility with which we have contributed to the global agenda have also made us a credible partner. The Indian-American community in the United States has acted as an effective bridge between the two societies.

Our cooperation in combating terrorism, checking WMD threats and responding to disasters like the tsunami is reflective of the new relationship. Following Dr. Rice's visit, I am confident that we can develop this further in the near future.

Q: Please explain about your relations with Pakistan.

A: Significant developments have taken place in the India-Pakistan relations since April 2003. Relations have been restored at the level of High Com-missioners. Transport and com-munication links have resumed. One round of Composite Dialogue has been completed; another round has been initiated during the Foreign Secretary level talks in December 2004. People-to-people exchanges are taking place across the spectrum in large numbers. Our High Commission is currently issuing close to 10,000 visas per month.

The bilateral process has been given impetus through maintenance of high level contacts: Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh met President Musharraf in New York in September 2004; Pakistani PM Shaukat Aziz visited New Delhi on Nov. 23~24, 2004; EAM visited Pakistan in February 2005 where agreements were reached to start bus services between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad, and between Lahore and Amritsar, including to religious places such as Nankana Sahib.

Pakistan also agreed to work towards the early restoration of the Khokrapar-Munabao rail link. We have moved ahead in the areas of nuclear CBMs and on issues of drug trafficking and terrorism. Both sides have conducted a joint survey of the horizontal segment of the International Boundary in the Sir Creek area. Progress has been achieved on the humanitarian issue of fishermen and civilian detainees. Pakistan has recently released over 500 fishermen and 30 civilian prisoners. The most significant outcomes of the process so far has been the ceasefire that has held for more than a year and the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service that will begin on April 7, 2005.

India's decision to discuss the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline with Pakistan is also an indication of the changed environment and expectations in India-Pakistan relations. Thus, meaningful progress has been achieved and the government intends to continue with the present process in an atmosphere free from terrorism and violence. A relationship of friendship and co-operation between India and Pakistan is not just desirable, but in the current context, it is an imperative.

Q: What is the best way to solve the North Korean nuclear issue?

A: India has emphasized the need for a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issues in the Korean peninsula through dial-ogue and cooperation of all concerned states. We are disappointed that the DPRK has suspended its participation in the Six-Party Talks. Dialogue and consultation among all parties concer-ned remains the best way to resolve the issue. It is our view that the six-party process provides the best forum for progress in this direction. We hope that all parties would make sincere efforts for an early resumption of the talks.

Q: Would you explain about your relations with China?

A: Our relations with China have seen rapid improvement across diverse areas in recent years, and have entered a new phase of comprehensive development. Bilateral trade and

economic co-operation has grown rapidly. The trade volume crossed US\$13 billion last year. China is already our second largest trade partner.

Due to concerted efforts by both sides, mutual trust and understanding between the two countries has been continuously deepened, sustained by regular high-level exchanges. On international and regional issues, the two countries have maintained good communication and cooperation.

The relations have now reached a level of maturity where we are engaged in continuously expanding our commonalities and exploring newer areas of cooperation, while pro-actively addressing the outstanding differences in a purposive manner. I am confident that the forthcoming visit of Premier Wen Jiabao to India will add further impetus to our bilateral relations.