



Press Conference by Assistant Secretary Boucher in Calcutta, India

Richard Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs
The American Center
Calcutta, India
August 4, 2006

Released by the United States Embassy New Delhi

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be with you today. It is a real pleasure to be here in Calcutta. It is my first chance to visit the city, but I have heard about it for so many years. It's an exciting place, and a very exciting time, and I am glad I was able to come here today. I am glad I was able to meet all the people I've met today and learn about all the things that are happening in Bengal and Calcutta, and indeed, the eastern part of India. I met today: business people, students, academics, the Chief Minister; had a chance to see some history, hear a lot about the economic dynamism of this area, and the elements that went into making it a dynamic economic area, and hopefully, the elements that will serve it well in the future. I had a chance to discuss and consider how the United States can work here through our Consul General and the new office that we just opened for the Foreign Commercial Service, and also through our outreach programs, through our business programs, through the American private sector, and the American academic community who have an increasingly important relationship here in this part of India. It's been an excellent opportunity for me to learn about this part of India, and perhaps understand a little better the dynamic of Indian society these days, as I move on to Delhi to continue the work with my Indian counterparts in the Ministry of External Affairs. I expect we will talk a lot about developments in India, but also developments in the region. Here we try to work together, and find increasingly numerous areas where we indeed work together. So I am pleased to be here as part of another visit to India, and my first chance to stop in this part of India and I just really appreciate the effort and how gracious and how interesting the people have been today that I have been able to meet with. So thank you. That's all I want to say in the beginning and I'll be glad to take questions about anything you want.

QUESTION: My name is Abhijit Ghosal. I represent a television channel called Kolkata TV. The question is: at the centerpiece of Indo-U.S. relations lies the new nuclear treaty which was signed. And as you know the last year, in India has been opposing this tooth and nail. In your meeting with the Chief Minister did you try to tap the Left's mind as to what makes them oppose this deal?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I may have missed an opportunity to 'tap the Left mind' as you say, tap the mind of the left-wing people here. But we didn't really talk about it that much. I think from my part you know we are a democracy, you are a democracy. This is new, this is different. This is a break with the past -- it's a break with our past policy, it's a break with your past policy. And I am not surprised, there are a lot of questions, there's a lot of discussion about it. I think when you look at all sides of the debate, look at all sides of the discussions, certainly in the United States, it has come out in a very positive direction. We had a lot of questions raised from people who were genuinely, sincerely concerned about non-proliferation. But in the end as we talked through it, we got a very strong vote in our House of Representatives from people who believe in non-proliferation, but also from people who believe in having a new relationship with India. And I think we will get the same from our Senate. So I am not surprised in India there are issues raised by doing something new, by doing something different. But through a democratic process, through all our discussions, I think in the end people will see this is good for India, it's good for United States. It's good for your economic future. It's good for non-proliferation around the world. It's a good deal. We ought to do it.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, throughout the world -- I am Subir Bhaumik for the BBC World Service here -- there is increasing concern about small arms proliferation originating from China all across Asia. Name a conflict anywhere in Asia and its Chinese small arms making its way into the Indian subcontinent, as well as other parts of Asia through various means. Is America worried about it?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Yes, we are. But it's been an issue, I have to tell you, I am not personally that familiar with. We have worked it on a global basis with other major United Nations members, aimed at a small arms proliferation from a variety of sources. We see these arms appearing in conflicts, and with the illegal armies in Africa; we've seen them in guerilla groups, and separatist groups. It's just too easy to get weapons of that kind around the world. So I think there is some concern on a global scale, and we try to work with other countries to stop the proliferation and the trade, the illegal trade in small arms.

QUESTION: My name is Abhijit Nandi Mazumdar. I am from AAJTAK Hindi news TV channel. The U.S. Treasury Department has designated Dawood Ibrahim as a specially designated global terrorist under executive order number 13224. And they have also designated Ibrahim from knowing to have financed activities of Laskar-e-Taiba..... Now these people know, our agencies know, most agencies know -- Dawood Ibrahim is right now in Pakistan. Pakistan has given shelter to Dawood. And he is also some way responsible for the Mumbai bomb blasts and the blasts right now 993 where it is written in the U.S..... Internet this thing, also responsible for this blast which happened two days back. So why is America, the United States, not doing something to help India? Find Dawood, extradite Dawood, implicate Dawood, and punish Dawood Ibrahim?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: The United States works with everybody in this region against terrorism. We are serious about it. We are serious working with India. We are serious working with Pakistan. We are serious working with Bangladesh. We work with Pakistan on all the varieties of extremism and terrorism that exists there. We try to encourage them to move against anybody, any individual group in Pakistan that might be supporting terrorism. It not only harms us, and harm the people in the region, it harms Pakistan. President Musharraf has recognized that. He has taken a lot of steps. We continue to work with him as we continue to work with other countries in this region. We are going to beat terrorism by working together. And we are going to work together with the countries around here to do that. You know Mr. Ibrahim is indeed on our list. We do think he was responsible for some of the previous crimes. I don't know personally whether he is responsible for this one or not, but he is indeed on our list, and he is indeed somebody we would like to see brought to justice for everything that he's done. But I think we are all going to see our way through this; by working together. And that remains our position and that remains what we are trying to do.

QUESTION: I am Anirban Roy from Hindustan Times. Ambassador Boucher, you just mentioned that you had been working very closely with India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to fight terrorism. But what is your understanding of Bangladesh... because so far as we believe Bangladesh is not only aiding and abetting the separatist Indian guerilla forces, but is also, you know, supporting and helping the Islamic forces to fight against India. So what is U.S. Government's understanding of the situation in Bangladesh?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I was just in Bangladesh for two days, and you know that is not an extensive experience but it's something we follow closely. We have.... no... let me answer your question. We see that Bangladesh is a very populated country with a developing security service, a developing ability to fight terrorism, with some successes already that they can show in terms of arresting the leaders of the major terrorist group that has been operating in Bangladesh, but with a lot of work left to do, in terms of getting the whole network and getting, stopping other people who might be operating there. The question is: what is the best way to get those people? There are two things that they've got to do and we're trying to help. One is to build up their security capability, and we've been trying to work with them to train them to exchange information with them, to cooperate with them to build up their ability to get at the terrorists and extremists that might be undermining their society, and going back and forth across the border. And the second is to help them achieve a sort of healthier society, a better state of political economy; and we've been doing that as well.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, I am Devdeep, and I work with the newspaper The Telegraph here. You know, when the Chief Minister was sworn in this time, the first thing he said was the Left is opposed to any strategic partnership with the U.S. But he also said that if we want to invite U.S. capital. You think that something like this is okay -- that on the one hand they are opposing strategic partnership, and then they are trying to invite U.S. capital. And in that light I want some comments from you on your

meeting with the Chief Minister.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: That sounds like politics to me and that sounds... I don't want to get into politics. I understand that he comes from a different political party, and different background. I understand there is a lot of debate and discussion going on within his party, as well as, with his party and others in the political spectrum in India. I spent a lot of time working in China and Deng Xiaoping used to say it doesn't matter if a cat's black or white as long as long as it catches rats. And I think when you work with people who are pragmatic, who want to accomplish something, who want to see their people have opportunity, who want to see opportunities, and democracy, and free markets can bring the people and want to see economic development for all the people in society... We think we can play a role working with the people here, working with the government here, that these conditions that they have created here, that the opportunities they created are here for their own people that match up with many of our country's, with many of our economic interests, and we are going to be here working with them. I have no problem working with the Chief Minister. I think he is interested in opening up opportunities for his people and so are we. So as far as what political stance he might take on this regard it is not really a matter I can get involved in? Finally we can work together, so we are going to do it.

QUESTION: I am Pervez Hafeez from the Asian Age newspaper. Ambassador Boucher in Dhaka after your arrival you met a group of Imams. There you said the USA is working to establish global peace. Will you please inform us what the USA is doing to stop the war that is raging in Lebanon now?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: We are doing a number of things. And we are very active, and the Secretary of State is spending most of her time on this these days. The first thing that we've tried to do was to arrange the 48-hour cessation of bombing, and the 24-hour period for humanitarian convoys, so that the people of Lebanon could escape from the fighting...could escape from the suffering. The second thing we've tried to do is to provide food, medical assistance humanitarian assistance from us and from others to help those people as well. We recognized the suffering; we feel for the people have been caught in this conflict, and we tried to help them out, and take care of their immediate humanitarian needs. The third thing we've tried to do is to end the conflict, to end the fighting. This is an abnormal situation where a terrorist group backed by Iran can start a war in a county that they don't control. The issue here is again what we worked on all along with the UN resolutions previously and that is the Lebanese government -- legitimate Lebanese authorities' -- control over its own territory, so that somebody else can't start a war in your country...can't get your country involved in a conflict that way. We have tried to create a situation where the rockets stop and the bombs stop, where the Israelis can work peacefully and in safety, and the Lebanese can live peacefully and in safety. And that's our goal. And we've worked very hard on that sector, and the Secretary of State has worked hard on it to try to get the UN resolution passed, try to work out the arrangements for an international force, and we are hoping she can do that in a short time but that remains the main focus of her diplomacy right now.

QUESTION: Sir, in your earlier address at the Indian Chamber of Commerce you have said that despite trade talks collapsed in the Doha round, the United States is prepared to demonstrate more flexibility. Will you please elaborate on this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I can't make you an offer today...but if you look at the history of this Round, and I think it is still going on, although not perhaps, not quite in the same way. The United States has made very significant offers on agriculture market access issues, agricultural subsidies. We already have lower subsidies than Europeans, and we offered to cut our subsidies even more than they did. Some of the offers they did not manage to cut at all. So we have been quite forthcoming already, and we have said we are willing to negotiate; we are willing to be flexible. We believe in the benefits of more open trading, we've seen it for ourselves. We've had a huge outcry in our country over imports sometimes, over various kinds of trade practices. We have punished the illegal ones, but if there is legitimate trade we've been a very helpful nation, to the tune of \$400 billion trade deficit, and going up. Probably more than that this year. So I believe the United States has shown, not only a willingness to open up with trading relationships around the world, but already we've shown a lot of good offers. And we've said you know that as others try to negotiate, as others tell us what they want, what they are prepared to do, we'll consider other things too. So trade negotiations -- I think you saw Sue Schwab, our trade negotiator, went down to Brazil to talk to them and I am sure she will be talking to others around the world just to see if we can't still try to put this together, because we absolutely believe that for the developing world the opportunity to trade is going to be the chief engine for economic growth. And people who open these opportunities make a bigger contribution to relieving poverty and achieving economic prosperity in the world. In that way, that is more than anything else we can do and we are committed to doing that.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, now that the Maoists in Nepal they have agreed to show interest in democratic ways, what is the United States' approach to the Maoists now? And does it agree to the formation of a constituent Assembly? And in this connection, the Indian government has described the Maoists in India as the greatest, biggest internal threat. So how does the U.S. government view the Maoists situation in India? I am Banerjee from the Times of India.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Now the Maoists in Nepal...if they want to become a legitimate political party and participate in the politics that would be great. We would welcome that. If they want to continue to be terrorists, if they want to continue to hijack people, they want to shake down corporations, if they want to continue to beat people, they want to continue to invade villages and intimidate people, and kill people, then we are still going to call them terrorists. And unfortunately while they profess a desire to join the political process, they have yet to give up violence, they have yet to give up their guns. But if they do so, then it is up to the political parties, to the political process in Nepal to figure out how they fit in. They appear to agree that they will give up their arms, we'll want to see them do it. The Nepalese political parties all seem to agree on their constituent assembly. That is fine, that's their choice. And we want to work with the people of Nepal -- to try to overcome the effects of the plan that the King caused Nepalese politics; to overcome the deterioration of the infrastructure and the economy that was caused by years of fighting. And so we announced a pretty significant aid package as well for Nepal. Finally, let me add one thing. This is in fact an example of when the United States and India have coordinated and cooperated very closely and I think it is a very positive sign for our relationship and I think we have been able to help the people of Nepal more by working together, than we would if we had stayed separate on this. And so I am looking forward to further discussions with my/our colleagues in Delhi when I go there tomorrow.

QUESTION: I am Saxena from Headlines Today. Jaswant Singh, a senior BJP leader had stated that there was a U.S. mole in Prime Minister Narasimhan's cabinet. What is U.S. reaction to this?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: First of all, I really don't know anything about it. I think the State Department in Washington is pointing it out that the people, the letter, you know, there are some odd things about them, we don't know if it is authentic or not. And the individuals who were identified were not even in the government at the time the letter was supposedly written. So I will leave it to others to figure it out. It does not mean a lot to me, it doesn't. I don't have any way of knowing. I don't know much about it, but I know it is not a big deal, frankly. And I haven't had a chance to read the book as yet, so I will read the book.

QUESTION: I am Monideepa from NDTV. And I know you are going to have more of this when you get to Delhi but recently there has been quite a furor about the nuclear deal. I would like you to comment on what the leaders here are saying, and the opposition and Left as you mentioned about the goalpost have been changed. How is the United States going to address these concerns? And the concern is not just in the opposition but in the government as well...

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I think I saw the Prime Minister the other day saying let's judge this by the final legislation. That is certainly my view. We have what we think is good legislation passed by the House. The Senate still has to deal with the issue, there's a few things in the Senate Bill that we don't like...we'll try to change. And then it goes to conference between the two bodies so that they can work out the final piece of legislation that they can pass. I am pretty confident, I am very confident that the legislation that is finally passed by our Congress will allow us to implement the deal the way it was signed and the way it was agreed between Prime Minister Singh and President Bush. We have made that very clear to our Congress so that was one of our goals. We had a lot of argument in the House about this provision and that provision, and this amendment and that amendment. But in the end not only did the members of the House want to support the new relationship with India but they wanted to implement this arrangement the way it was agreed to without requiring any re-negotiation. And I think we will get to that point in the Senate as well. I think we will get to that point with the final legislation so I am confident we will implement this the way it was agreed.

QUESTION: I am [inaudible] from Doordarshan News. There is a growing concern that Pakistan is giving protection to the terrorists' activities taking place in India and India wants Pakistan to dismantle their terrorist camps. What do you say?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Pakistan has set as a goal of national policy to end terrorism on its territory. They have outlawed various terrorist groups and we have all been concerned about Lashkar-e-Taiba, in particular. They have made it clear. President Musharraf has made it clear that he does not want these groups on his territory, and that he will take action against them. We are working with Pakistan to try to help them make that action effective. Obviously it is a lot of work to do. We all have work to do to fight terrorism, and Pakistan is one of our partners in doing that work; but I don't think there is any question that terrorist activity on anybody's territory

needs to be eliminated. We raise all these things with Pakistan, just as we raise issues with other countries. So it is no surprise it is one of their goals, and one of our goals, and something we are working on that we think is important.

QUESTION: I am Rajat from Chhobis Ghante Television. Your government has a strong reservation against Iran. How do you see the future of Indo-U.S. relationship as the Indo-Iranian gas line project is getting momentum day by day?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't know if that project is going to go forward or not. There seem to be some questions today in the newspaper about the price of gas. I won't make any predictions about the project itself. The United States is concerned about Iranian behavior. We would like to have a good relationship with Iran and we have great respect for the people of Iran for their culture, for their history, for their energy. We have a lot of Iranian-Americans in the United States who love their homeland. But when you see a country in a critical region that is sending rockets to kill innocent people, that is trying to oppose peace ... the peace process with violence, that has undermined the Palestinians; that has undermined the Lebanese government. This is all supported by Iran. Iran is violently opposed to the peace process. The President of Iran, just a day or two ago, said he wanted to annihilate the state of Israel. Now, do you want a man like that to have nuclear weapons? He may not be able to do it now, but God forbid, if he should acquire nuclear weapons. And we know from the International Atomic Energy Agency reports that for almost two decades, Iran has been trying to develop nuclear weapons. They have violated commitments, violated their agreements, thrown out their safeguards, kicked off the inspectors, and broken the seals. So I think it's no surprise we have some problems with that. But our problems are with Iranian behavior, not with the Iranian people, or with Iran's existence as a nation. It's the things that they do. And we try to work with various people to encourage them not to do those things. We have tried to support the Palestinians against the violent opposition of Iran-supported groups. We've tried to work with Europeans to provide incentives to Iran to abandon its quest for nuclear weapons. We have tried to work with all countries around the region that might be affected by the instability that that would cause. And indeed we found that other countries in the region, for example India, don't want Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. That's an aspect of Iranian policy that would be very disturbing to people in this region. So we work together when we can. We certainly understand that people in the neighborhood are going to have some kind of relationship with Iran. But we think one has to be rather clear about their behavior, and rather forthright about the implications of some of those things.

QUESTION: I am from Business Standard. My name is Shimona. Since you have set up the commercial... you have appointed a Commercial Officer, and it is said here it is to promote exports. Do you have any specific projects in mind and if you plan to get Wal-Mart once again into the State? Like what other projects we can look at in the near future?

CONSUL GENERAL: [Inaudible] the Commercial Office is to provide a facility, a platform for American businesses to come here to East India and look at opportunities to partner with Indian businesses. To find partners either to franchise or to service agents or to sell products, American products. So there are different companies that are engaging with this office already. One of the other things that's going to be coming up is at the end of this year. Under Secretary Frank Lavin from our Commerce Agency -- I am sorry, the Commerce Department -- is going to be coming out and leading a very large delegation starting off in Mumbai. But that delegation of American businesses will then split off to other cities throughout India. And one of the cities that the delegation will be coming to...we'll have about twenty odd businesses. We haven't got the full list yet, but we are working on trying to get American businesses as part of this large delegation out here to Calcutta as well. And so that Foreign Commercial Office will be working on that and that delegation's visit will coincide with the West Bengal Business Seminar that takes place every year. This year again it will be taking place at the beginning of December. So again, that is a project that this office here is working on -- is to have a part of the large delegation, about 20 or so, come out during the time of West Bengal business seminar. So we are actively working on trying to get American businesses to look at opportunities in East India.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: Can I answer a part, one aspect of that question? The implication in your question that opening up the retail sector is only good for the United States. And first of all, Wal-Mart in the United States is quite controversial -- they sell products from China, they sell products from India, they sell products from Bangladesh, Pakistan, from Mozambique, from Mauritius, from El Salvador, from Mexico, from any country you name. These are products from developing countries. These are products quite often of people, of laborers finding a first job in a factory. These are frankly economic opportunities for a lot of poor people around the world. But it is very controversial in the United States because people say it puts small stores out of business. And they do cause a certain economic dislocation. Competition is not always easy, but in the long run it is very healthy. And it's good for America, it is good for American consumers, it's good for the price structure in America, it's good for our trading balances, because in the end, some of these imports are produced with exports of U.S. equipment and technology. It is good for our relationships, and I think by and large, most Americans have welcomed the expansion of the retail sector in the United States. So I hope our experiences are similar to your experiences here, if you would open up the retail sector. I think the first beneficiary of opening the retail sector will be the Indian people, the Indian consumers, and that's why it is a step that we have always recommended and we will continue to support.

QUESTION: Mr. Boucher, this is Sumanta Roychoudhury. Considering the fact that the Iran issue is not a binding part of the bill on the nuclear deal, would you still expect India to continue with the U.S. lines of the Iran issue?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY BOUCHER: I don't think India has followed the U.S. line on the Iran issue. I think India has followed the Indian line on the Iran issue. I think India has made a calculation of what its interests are. I think that India has taken a strategic look at this region, and said we don't want a nuclear bomb there, for very good reasons. So I don't think our deals are dependent on that. On the other hand, India has made a rational and strategic calculation of its interests and I wouldn't expect that to change.

CONSUL GENERAL: Okay, I would like to close today's event by thanking again Ambassador Boucher for taking time to come here to Calcutta to see some of the people in Calcutta, learn a little about the history of Calcutta, meet with a cross section of individuals and organizations. I would also like to thank him for taking the time to come to our Consulate and American Center, seeing a little bit of the operations we have here at the American Center, as well as inaugurating our new Foreign Commercial Service office and introducing our new Foreign Commercial Officer to the larger community. So thank you again, Ambassador Boucher for coming here. I would also like to thank the Press for coming and participating in today's event, and thank you all very much for your questions.

And that concludes today's event. Thank you.

Released on August 5, 2006

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.