

- ▶ [Latest Embassy News](#)
- ▼ [Ambassador Speeches & Remarks](#)
- ▶ [About the Embassy](#)
- ▶ [Photo Gallery](#)
- ▶ [Contact Us](#)

## Speeches and Remarks

### Customs Cooperation is New Facet of U.S.-India Cooperation

**By David C. Mulford, U.S. Ambassador to India**

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Yesterday, we witnessed an event that exemplifies my vision for the cooperation between the United States and India - the signing of a Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement, or CMAA. This bilateral treaty, which formalizes an already-excellent working relationship between our two Customs Administrations, will, as its name suggests, be of benefit to our two countries in the prevention, investigation and repression of customs offenses, and, equally importantly given today's international environment, in our collaborative efforts in the global war on terrorism.

Prime Minister Singh, in a letter to President Bush congratulating him on his re-election, wrote that our bilateral relations have undergone a qualitative transformation and that "we must embark on a larger and a more ambitious agenda for broader strategic cooperation, high technology, commerce and defense." This agreement does precisely this by building upon a relationship that has been growing in an ever-widening range of areas.

In recent years, increasingly open borders and greater sophistication in information and telecommunications

technology have helped spur a boom in world trade, but also given new opportunities to international criminal and terrorist networks. To respond to this challenge, the U.S. has sought to establish a network of bilateral agreements with customs agencies around the world to promote the rule of law and thwart potential terrorist activity. The United States has already signed over 50 bilateral agreements of this kind, and yesterday, it was my government's pleasure to welcome India into this expanding global partnership of law enforcement and criminal interdiction.

What does this treaty actually do? U.S. domestic laws and the national laws of most other countries do not normally permit the reciprocal disclosure of information, in the absence of a formal agreement or treaty. The CMAA which was originally conceived in 2001 and authorized by the Indian Cabinet in 2003, establishes a formal mechanism for the exchange and sharing of intelligence and investigative data between our two Customs Administrations: the Central Board of Excise and Customs, in the Department of Revenue of the Indian Ministry of Finance; and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The intelligence and information shared will help us investigate, detain, and prosecute individuals and organizations engaged or implicated in terrorist activity, trade fraud, money laundering, narcotics trafficking, smuggling of weapons of mass destruction, cyber-crime, child pornography, alien smuggling, violations of intellectual property rights, container security violations and general smuggling.

Bilateral U.S.-India cooperation in matters of law enforcement dates back to 1972 when the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration first established its field office in New Delhi. At that time and for the following thirty years, the primary focus of our joint efforts was on fighting drug trafficking and narco-terrorism. However, the horrendous terrorist attacks on the U. S. of September 11, 2001, in which not only Americans were killed but also citizens of some eighty other countries, including 250 Indian nationals, brought about a greater convergence of views on terrorism between the U.S. and India and a quantum leap in cooperation and sharing of information, technological know-how and financial resources, in all areas of

transnational crime.

At the policy level, our bilateral dialogue on law enforcement takes place within the Counter-Terrorism Joint Working Group that was established in 2000, even before the 9/11 attacks. Both our Customs Administrations then followed up this development with the reciprocal establishment of Customs Attaché Offices, in both New Delhi and New York. For its part, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security opened its office in New Delhi, in August 2002, with regional responsibility for India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Maldives and Bhutan.

The establishment of these offices has already resulted in an exchange of visits by Indian and ICE/CBP officials, for purposes of evaluating each country's seaport, airport and marine security systems, training programs and investigative operations.

In addition, the United States welcomes the interest of the Government of India in discussing the possibility of participating in the Container Security Initiative (CSI), an important international effort to enhance the security of cargo supply lines and ensure secure and efficient trade. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss this initiative with India when an official delegation travels soon to the United States to meet with CSI officials.

Over the past four years the governments of the United States and of India have repeatedly noted the transformation in relations between our countries, as reflected in our growing bilateral cooperation across an ever-broadening range of endeavors. From the outset of my term as Ambassador to India I made it a priority to help move the U.S.-India relationship from a strategic partnership to a comprehensive relationship in which all sectors of both Indian and U.S. societies are fully engaged.

Yesterday's signing of the U.S.-India Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement will not only enhance our bilateral law enforcement cooperation but mark an important milestone in developing this comprehensive relationship.

[back to top](#) ^

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