

Q & A Session during the visit of US Secretary of State

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Thank you Sir. We have time for just two questions, one will be from the media accompanying the US Secretary of State and another one from the Indian media.

Question from Reuters: Madam External Affairs Minister, you said India fully share Secretary Tillerson's vision for greatly expanding US-Indian relations and for India to play a greater security role in the Indo-Pacific region. In that context the Trump Administration is pressing countries around the world to cut diplomatic and trade ties with North Korea to strangle the hard currency flows that fund North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. India and North Korea maintain embassies in each other's capitals and bilateral trade in 2013 reportedly totaled to more than 90 million dollars, some 60 million of it Indian exports that include petroleum products critical to North Korea's military. Is India prepared to shut down trade with Pyongyang and close the embassies to demonstrate its readiness to expand the strategic partnership with the United States?

Mr. Secretary, in 2016 India and Afghanistan signed an agreement for India to develop the Southern Iranian port of Chabahar and build a railway line to Southern Afghanistan creating a trade corridor that would free Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistan's port of Karachi to which India has no access. India is investing millions in the project which will allow her to expand trade and assistance to Afghanistan. A key pillar of your administration's new South Asia policy yet the Trump Administration also has embarked on new strategy that takes more aggressive stand towards Iran in order to blunt its expanding influence in the Middle East. Isn't there a major risk that the two US strategies would clash in Chabahar that Iran could put the brakes on that project seriously undermining India's ability to fulfil the role envisioned for it in the Trump's Administration's plan for stabilizing Afghanistan? How do you prevent that from happening given the serious tensions between the United States and Iran? Thank you.

External Affairs Minister, Smt. Sushma Swaraj: The issue that you have raised about DPRK, I had a detailed discussion with Secretary Tillerson on this issue and both the things that you have said, one about trade reduction and the other about closing the embassies, on both the issues, I told Secretary Tillerson that as far as trade is concerned, our trade with DPRK has reduced substantially. It would not be wrong if I say it to be minimal. And as far as the issue of embassy is concerned, our embassy there is a very small one but it is there and I said to Secretary Tillerson that some embassies of your friend countries should remain there so that at least some channels of communication remain open.

Many a times there is a need to talk, there might be a requirement to resolve many a things through mutual dialogue so at least one embassy of your friend country should be there. And I think he has taken this point of mine in a very understanding way and he also understood both the things that we have reduced the trade and the size of embassy is very small but our embassy should remain there. He has appreciated both these things.

US Secretary of State, Mr. Rex Tillerson: With respect to the recently announced policy of United States towards Iran, I think it is important to keep a few things in mind. That policy, as you know, had three important pillars. One is dealing with the nuclear plan of action, the second important pillar of that policy was to deal with Iran's other destabilizing activities, their ballistic missile programs, their export of arms to terrorist organizations and other de-stabilizing exports of foreign fighters involved in the revolution in Yemen, Syria and other places and the third pillar, which again doesn't gets talked much about is the support of modern voices inside of Iran.

We know there are strong feelings and vibes inside of Iran that we want to promote that one day the Iranian people being able to retake control of their government. They live under this oppressive, revolutionary regime and we do not want to harm the Iranian people. Our fight is not with the Iranian people, our disagreements are with the revolutionary regimes.

So with that context as we are taking actions to impose sanctions on the regime in particular the Iranian revolutionary guard, it's our

objective to deny financing capacity and to disrupt activities related to these maligned behaviors. It's not our objective to harm the Iranian people, nor is our objective to interfere with legitimate business activities that are going on with other businesses whether they are with Europe or India or agreements that are in place that promote economic development and activity to the benefit of our friends and allies as well.

We think there is no contradiction within that policy in fact we are calling on some of the counterparties to join us in imposing sanctions on Iran's activities, particularly the activities of Iranian Revolutionary Guard corps and their subsidiaries to punish them for the de-stabilizing activities that we see Iran carrying out in the region.

So we don't see a contradiction there and we have very open dialogue and discussions with all of our friends and allies around the policy to ensure it is well understood but also if we see areas of concerns we engage with our friends and partners on ways they believe they can help, put the pressure on Iran to push back on the de-stabilizing activities of Iran that I think are of concern to many in the world.

Question from India TV: My question Secretary for you is that you just mentioned that safe havens of terror won't be tolerated but we have seen often on how Pakistan state has been harboring terrorists and supporting cross-border terrorism. Whenever the complicities pointed out to them, they very easily get away giving some tactical conditions or giving false assurances. So since you have just come from Pakistan to India, how do you look forward to deal with this issue, to solve this issue which is very crucial to us?

I would also like to ask a question to External Affairs Minister. Just now you mentioned about the H1B visa issues, can you tell us that when the issue was discussed which has impact on so many professionals, what are the steps being taken to solve this issue?

US Secretary of State, Mr. Rex Tillerson: In our discussions with Pakistani leadership yesterday at Islamabad, we had a very open and frank exchange around our concerns that United States shares with other regional allies as India and also Afghanistan that there are too many terrorist organizations that find a safe place in Pakistan from

where they conduct their operations and attacks against other countries. We have extended to Pakistan certain expectations that we have from their government, their leadership to deal with, in particular, these organizations, the leaders of these organizations and we are attempting to put in place a mechanism of cooperation to information sharing. Not just information sharing, but action to be taken to begin to deny these organizations the ability to launch attacks against others.

Quite frankly, my view and I have expressed this to the leadership of Pakistan, is we also are concerned about the stability and security of Pakistan's government as well as these terrorist organizations have enlarged their numbers and have enlarged their strength and capability within Pakistan borders. This can lead to a threat to Pakistan's own stability. It is not in anyone's interest that government of Pakistan be destabilized.

So we think we have a mutually shared interest in not just containing these organizations but ultimately eliminating these organizations. I think all of us have to commit ourselves to the eradication of terrorism, violent extremism and whatever form it takes and this is going to require international and global efforts and a common view and a common objective and mission. So these are expectations that we have put in place with the leadership of Pakistan. We want to work with Pakistan in a positive way because we think this is in their interest as well in longer term.

External Affairs Minister, Smt. Sushma Swaraj: In response to your question first let me clear that till now there has been no change in the H1B visa policy. But since certain bills have been presented in the US Congress, if they are passed then it would be detrimental to our skilled professionals. That is the reason India is giving high priority to this issue.

When I met Secretary Tillerson in New York then also I had raised this issue. Recently, sometime back a congressional delegation had come, I raised this issue with them also and today again I had raised this issue with Secretary Tillerson and I had put it in this way that the closeness of ties between America and India is such that no skilled professional expects that you will do something which will be

detrimental for them. They have this expectations that their interests would not be harmed.

The question that you asked about what is the way to solve it. Look changes in the policy of H1B visa can be made by two ways, either through Executive Order or passing of a bill by Congress. We are attacking from both sides. As far as Executive Order is concerned we are talking to the State Administration, like with Secretary Tillerson. As far as Congress is concerned, we are talking with Senators so that particular bill is not passed, as I said just now that we discussed with the Congressional Delegation.

So both these ways which can harm our interests we are working on the both the ways. We are discussing with White House, we are talking with State Administration so that no such EO is issued and we are also talking to Congressmen so no such bill is passed. These are the only two ways to resolve this. Thank you.

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Thank you Ma'am, thank you Sir. This concludes today's interaction. Thank you all for participation.

(Concludes)