

## Exclusive Interview with Nirupama Rao, Foreign Secretary



This is the FM Gold Channel of All India Radio. In the programme “Countrywide”, tonight we bring you an interview with Nirupama Rao, Foreign Secretary. The interviewer is Kalyani Shankar, Senior Journalist.

**KS:** Mrs. Nirupama Rao, you had been the Indian Ambassador to China before you took over as Foreign Secretary. You are fully aware of the Indo-China policy, the Sino-Indian policy also. Do you think the Chinese protest, it is on account of the huge turnout in the Assembly elections or there are other significant things like Pakistan Prime Minister Gilani is visiting Beijing? There have also been reports of a Chinese incursion in the last few months. And also the controversy about China issuing Visa papers to Kashmiris.

**FS:** We take a long term perspective in our relations with China. China is our largest neighbour. We share a very long boundary with China. There are outstanding issues relating to this boundary which are yet to be resolved. And, therefore, the whole issue that you referred to and the Chinese protests that have been made should be seen in the context of the

unresolved boundary question between the two countries. We are very intensively focused on this issue. But at the same time, one must understand that the relationship with China has also been developed in many other areas. And that development of relations and the concomitant build up of good communication and better understanding between the governments of the two countries and indeed also the academic institutions, the business and industry circles, better connectivity, all this has happened in the last twenty years. So this is what, well, in terms of bringing the two countries into a better mode of communication with each other. As far as boundary between the two countries is concerned, there is still a lot of ground that we have to cover in terms of narrowing differences and building more understanding. But progress in this regard is being made, albeit slowly but it is being made surely. We have the mechanism of the special representatives appointed by the two governments to look into these issues and they have held thirteen rounds of discussions so far. So, as far as the boundary question is concerned, even as we have had these reports of protests and the incursions, one must understand also that there is a situation in which both our countries are placed at the moment and that situation is this focus on trying to resolve the boundary question peacefully. And on that I believe, I can say it with all honesty, both governments are convinced that there is no other way to resolve this without dialogue. One has to resolve it through dialogue. I remember our first late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking to Parliament in 1962 saying “we cannot march to Peking” and I am quoting his words. But whatever it is, we must take a realistic view that there are differences, there are differences when it comes to perceiving the line of actual control in the border areas. And there are differences also in terms of

conflicting territorial claims. So this is a very complex issue. It is one of the most complicated boundary questions that exist anywhere in the world. But I think it is a good development and it is a positive factor that both countries are determined to resolve these issues.

**KS:** Do you think in the next round of discussions between the two special representatives, this incursions will be taken up and also about this Arunachal issue will come up because it is again referring to the border?.

**FS:** In fact, the focus that has been given to both the incursions and also to the Arunachal Pradesh issue, only I think intensifies the need for the two sides to really sit down to resolve these issues with even more seriousness and determination. Because, I think, both governments understand that a peaceful relationship between India and China is not only good for the two countries but it is good for this region, it is good globally also. Just look at the number of issues on which we can cooperate, we are cooperating whether it comes to the Doha Development round, whether it comes to climate change issues, whether it comes to cooperation in multilateral fora, in the reform of the international financial system in the wake of the global economic crisis. There are many many other issues in the relationship where we have common ground where there is a meeting of minds, so I think, we must look at this whole relationship in the larger perspective.

**KS:** But is the government taking it very seriously, I mean what has been said about Prime Minister's visit. As you said earlier rightly that this is not the first time they have protested. They have protested earlier also.

**FS.** Of course we take this seriously, and we have been very very particular and very clear and unambivalent in expressing our position to the Chinese. In that way we have said that Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India, it is an inalienable part of India.

**KS :** Mrs. Rao, will there be any change about Dalai Lama visiting Arunachal next month? He is supposed to go there and, I think, Indian government has put a condition that he should not talk anything political and Chinese are objecting to this also?

**FS:** Well, we regard and we have always said this clearly and also to China that His Holiness Dalai Lama is a spiritual figure, he is a religious figure and he does not indulge in political activities on Indian soil and he is our guest in India and he is free to visit any part of our country.

**KS :** Mrs. Rao, the Chinese Foreign Minister is due to visit India shortly for the Russia-China-India trilateral. What issues will be discussed in this meeting and also at what level will our Foreign Minister be raising these points?

**FS:** Kalyani this is a trilateral meeting of the Foreign Ministers, India-Russia-China trilateral. This is the structure that the three countries have devised and this enables us to discuss issues of regional importance and of course, our External Affairs Minister will be meeting his Chinese counterpart during this meeting and this meeting will afford us the opportunity to touch upon various issues of mutual concern and mutual interest in the bilateral relationship, but you must understand that the larger context of this meeting is trilateral. But, there will be bilateral meetings and

of course, it goes without saying that whenever we have the opportunity to meet between the two countries, as we would on this occasion, the opportunity does arise for us to raise all issues including issues of concern because it is through discussion, through frank discussion and through open discussion and through discussion at that level, we can remove misunderstandings.

**KS:** What is going to be the agenda of the trilateral meeting?

**FS:** The agenda of the trilateral meeting will basically be as I said, discussion of the regional situation, discussion of the opportunities that arise to strengthen dialogue between the three of our countries which are major powers in this region and to look at energy security, to look at issues like better connectivity, issues like dialogue between the academic institutions, the think tanks of the three countries, to look at business and industry relations. So there is a whole gamut of issues that would be discussed.

**KS :** It would be a long agenda indeed. We have problems with Pakistan also. So now the two Foreign Secretaries were supposed to meet in New York last month.

**FS :** They did meet.

**KS :** Then after that what is the progress?

**FS :** Well, during these meetings, we have had useful meeting with the Pakistani Foreign Secretary and our External Affairs Minister with his Pakistani counterpart. They were useful meetings that were held in New

York last month. And during these meetings we were able to communicate to the Pakistani side that while Pakistan is our neighbour and that we have always understood that it is only through dialogue that we can normalize relations between the two countries and build more satisfying degree of understanding between the two countries. It is very essential and we were communicating this to the Pakistani side on behalf of the Government of India and also on behalf of the people of India that the threat and the effect of terrorism which has been directed against the people of India from Pakistani soil by groups, by institutions, by individuals that operate with impunity from Pakistani soil, is the cause of utmost concern for us, because we have been victims of terrorism.

And for a meaningful dialogue to be transacted between the two countries, between the governments, between the institutions of the two countries it is essential that Pakistan addresses this threat of terrorism seriously and meaningfully and effectively.

And this is particularly so in the context of the investigations into the Mumbai terror attacks. A little more than a month from now, it will be one year and in Pakistan the trial of those accused and also the investigation into Hafeez Sayed and still we have not had satisfaction on that as yet from the Pakistan side. And we continue to emphasise this to the Pakistani authorities that it is essential that they move resolutely and meaningfully and they take action against these individuals because it is only through that process that we will see an end to these problems.

**KS:** We have been saying this that the culprits should be brought to book, we have been insisting again and again. We have been saying that there will be no composite dialogue, but still there is not much of forward movement. They only go ahead with whatever they are saying, nothing more than this. They say no credible evidence. We have given evidence, still it is not satisfactory.

**FS:** Well, we should not, in my view, let down our guard on this issue and that I feel very very strongly that we must continue to

emphasise our concerns to Pakistan because what we are saying is for the good of Pakistan also. You see the effect of terrorism in Pakistan also, so I think it is time that Pakistan understood the danger, the clear and present danger that exists from terrorism. We are the voice of sanity, the Indian Government and the Indian people, and I think Pakistan must come round to understanding the sincerity and the seriousness that we attach to this.

**KS:** Well, we talk of Pakistan, but I want to move forward to Afghanistan where our embassy has been attacked recently and it was done earlier also. So, where it is going to lead us?

**FS:** Again, the attacks on our embassy in Kabul last week and the attack last July 2008 have also brought home, not only to us in this region, but also to the international community, the threat and danger that exists from terrorism. The unhindered way in which terrorist groups have been allowed to operate in this region and we must understand that there is very very great urgent immediate need for the international community to be one

on tackling this threat. And what has happened in Afghanistan, we are in Afghanistan to help the people of Afghanistan. Our development partnership with Afghanistan has won us hearts and minds in Afghanistan and there is no doubt about it. I went to Afghanistan myself and had the opportunity to meet President Karzai, Foreign Minister and National Security Adviser, Dr. Rasool.

All of them were unanimous in their appreciation of the role that India is playing in Afghanistan to help the Afghan people. We have no other agenda in Afghanistan, we are there to help.

**KS:** But Pakistan should realize this.

**FS :** Of course, it is essential that Pakistan realizes this and Pakistan understands that we are there for legitimate reasons, we are there to help the people of Afghanistan.

**KS :** Well, the next big thing for India is the Prime Minister's visit to Washington next month. I think this is the first State visit Mr. Obama US President will have after he has taken over. What is going to be the agenda between the two leaders.

**FS :** Well, we have a global partnership with the United States. As President Obama said recently to our Prime Minister "there are new well springs of cooperation in this relationship. When Ms. Hillary Clinton, the Secretary of State was here in July, we announced this new dialogue architecture between the two countries and the pillars not only concern strategic issues or security issues, they also concern human development

issues, issues like agriculture, energy, cooperation in energy, gender empowerment, the environment, the education issues, there are many many pillars to this dialogue today. The visit of our Prime Minister to Washington will enable us to take this dialogue forward and it will strengthen and consolidate our partnership with the government and with the people of the United States.

**KS:** You were the High Commissioner to Sri Lanka earlier and right now the leaders from Tamil Nadu, and all parties for that matter, they are making noise about the treatment of the Tamil fishermen. What is your comment about this?

**FS:** We are in constant touch with the Sri Lankan authorities. Whenever there are cases of our fishermen, unwittingly or inadvertently, straying into Sri Lankan waters and if they are apprehended by the Sri Lankan side, we take immediate steps to secure their release and take up their case with the Sri Lankan authorities.

**KS:** What about the ethnic Tamils and their rehabilitation?

**FS :** Well, as you know, we have announced a package a Rs.500 crores of assistance to help the ethnic Tamils because then they can return to their homes and resume their livelihood.

**KS:** Thank you very much for being with us Mrs. Rao.