

## **US asks India, Pakistan to resolve issues bilaterally**

22/12/2015 20:25 by admin

**Washington:** Acknowledging "legitimate terrorism concerns and threats" in South Asia, US says it continues to welcome and encourage efforts by India and Pakistan to work bilaterally to solve very difficult, complicated issues between them.

"Every political leader has responsibilities .especially ones that are dealing here with sensitive relations," State Department spokesman John Kirby told reporters Monday in response to a question.

Asked about reports that Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has asked his ministers not to make anti-India statements, the spokesperson said he had not seen the comments.

"You have a responsibility to preserve security and stability. At the same time. you also have a responsibility, we believe, to preserve freedom of speech and freedom of expression," he said.

"I would just say we continue to welcome efforts by India and Pakistan to work bilaterally to solve these very difficult, complicated issues," Kirby said.

"And so that they have started to do that and appear to be genuinely interested in fostering greater understanding between the two countries, that's welcome, he said. "And we continue to encourage that."

But "there's always a balance to be struck here. And without having more detail about his comments or the context in which they were made, I'd really be loath to go further than that."

Asked about Pakistani Nobel prize-winner Malala Yousufzai's reported comments that at least 269 schools and other educational institutions in Pakistan were run by Mumbai attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed, Kirby said he could not speak to those specific allegations as he had not seen the report.

But "we want both countries to work through the tensions themselves," he said noting, "There are legitimate terrorism concerns and threats and challenges in that part of the world."

"We want everybody to contribute - because everybody can be a victim - Pakistan no less - of terrorism - and certainly India," he said.

"So it's important that both sides work together to communicate, coordinate, cooperate as much as they can against this common threat," Kirby added.

Asked if the US was going to talk to Pakistan about these allegations, he said: "We've been crystal clear for well over a decade now, working bilaterally with Pakistan, about our concerns about terrorism in the region."

These "include the safe havens that we know terrorist organizations have along that spine between Afghanistan and Pakistan," Kirby said.

"This is a relationship that remains vital to us. We don't always see eye to eye on everything," he said. "But there's no reason why we shouldn't see eye to eye on the threat of terrorism since so many Pakistani citizens and Pakistani soldiers have fallen victim to it."

While he could not talk about specifics of Malala's allegations, Kirby noted, "Terrorism remains a real and challenging threat that it behoves everybody to try to get their hands around."

- IANS