



News Release



Office of Public Affairs

U.S. Embassy

Bilateral Talks Aim to Boost Pakistan's Educational Reforms

(Dialogue focused on enhancing partnerships between U.S., Pakistani universities)

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Washington – For the first time since U.S. President George W. Bush and Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf agreed to focus on educational cooperation earlier this year, key officials from both countries met for a dialogue about programs and priorities. Both countries reaffirmed their commitment to improve Pakistan's educational infrastructure, train teachers and foster exchanges between universities and research institutions.

"A civilized, productive, developed society really begins with education," U.S. Secretary for Education Margaret Spellings told reporters before the session began. The delegations, led by Spellings and Pakistan's minister for education, Javed Ashraf, met at the State Department November 29.

Introducing the officials, Under Secretary of State R. Nicholas Burns underscored the importance of South Asia and Pakistan to the Bush administration: "There is no other country in the world more important to the United States when it comes to counterterrorism cooperation, and Pakistan has been a valued ally of our country." He said the two governments seek to broaden their relationship beyond counterterrorism. The United States government has been working hard to "build a multitude of bridges between our two countries. And nowhere is that more important than in education.

"We hope this is going to stimulate discussion between the two governments and our two education ministries," and develop "a good partnership between students and academics and universities in both of our countries," Burns said.

Spellings remarked on "how similar some of our issues are. ... We all have work to do around literacy ... on the development of technology and math and science capability."

Ashraf said Pakistanis have "suffered from poor educational standards and also from illiteracy," stressing that this must change. "Otherwise illiterate masses become ready

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recruits for all sorts of unhealthy activities. We want to give them meaningful education so they can contribute to the building of future Pakistan. We want a strong country,” he said.

U.S. ASSISTANCE FOR PAKISTAN’S EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

A five-year, \$100 million agreement between the United States and Pakistan supports Pakistan’s educational reform efforts, Spellings said. She said Pakistan has the largest Fulbright Program in the world, a valuable tool in training teachers and students alike.

The Fulbright Program offers scholarships to non-American students for study in the United States and to American students for study and research in foreign countries. Fellowships for scholars and teachers also are available. Fulbright exchange programs, offered in 140 countries, promote mutual understanding through exchanges of people and knowledge.

In partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs assists education in Pakistan by a number of exchange programs for secondary, undergraduate and graduate students, teachers, scholars, professionals and researchers; English language programs; and counseling about educational opportunities for Pakistani students in the United States. American university students are brought to Pakistan for intensive Urdu and Punjabi study camps, and young Pakistani teachers are brought to American university campuses to assist in teaching Urdu and Punjabi and improve their own English.

During a roundtable discussion at the Washington Club November 30, Ashraf said he was “very satisfied” with the first educational dialogue. “I saw an understanding of our requirements.” He said his American counterparts “are ready to harmonize their actions with our education policy.” Augmenting math and science programs and bringing teachers up to a higher standard are high on the list.

School enrollment has increased significantly in the past five years, as much as 47 percent, Ashraf said. More girls are being educated, and the Pakistan government offers incentives to families who keep their girls in school. A major challenge now is training a sufficient number of competent teachers. Pakistan is implementing national standards for curricula and testing in all government schools, and is in the process of upgrading textbooks.

Parent-teachers associations have been introduced, a development that helps control absenteeism. “The concept has now been accepted,” he said, adding that USAID has contributed to this effort.

Attracting the private sector to finance education is part of the program. Ashraf said the private sector is becoming involved in improving Pakistan’s educational infrastructure. Government funding can go only so far, he said, and corporate and nongovernmental organizations are “a great help” in developing quality facilities.

Educational partnership between the United States and Pakistan dates back to 1948. Since then, USAID alone has provided nearly \$7.9 billion in support of education. The University of Peshawar was established in 1950 with the help of USAID funding. Five years later, the Institute of Business Administration in Karachi was opened with funding and technical support from USAID and the Wharton School of Finance of the University of Pennsylvania. Most recently, \$265 million has been allocated to train teachers and upgrade facilities at about 8,000 schools all over Pakistan, including in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The 2006 earthquake reconstruction program provides about \$9 million to rebuild 50 schools and train teachers and staff.

Additional information about the Fulbright Program is available on the program's Web site.

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