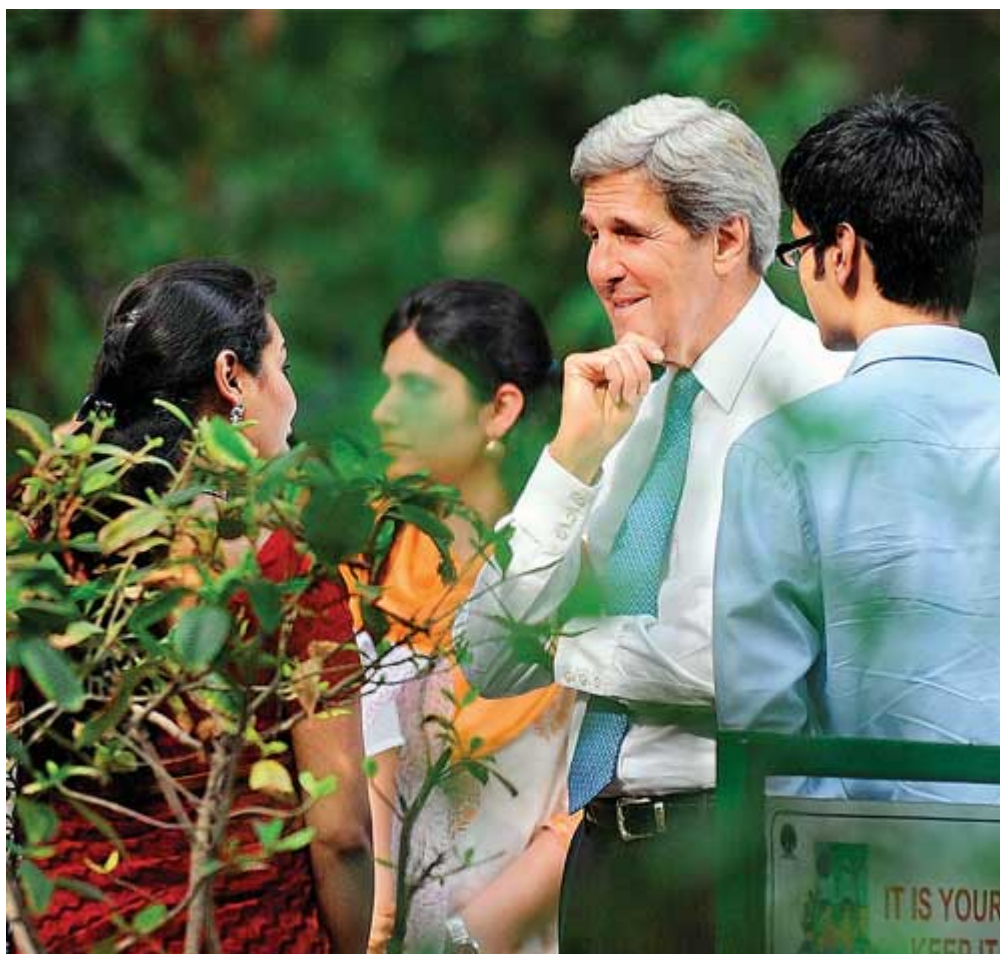




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DNA Correspondent

John Kerry says the LeT terrorist is against any further grilling.



US secretary of state John Kerry on Monday rejected India's request to allow interrogators to quiz LeT terrorist David Headley, who was involved in the 2008 Mumbai attacks and is now in US custody. Kerry, who is on a visit to India, highlighted legal complications to justify his stand.

Sources said that during the fourth round of the Indo-US strategic dialogue, co-chaired by external affairs minister Salman Khurshid, Kerry politely rejected India's request seeking access for a second time to Headley, saying that the LeT terrorist was opposing any further interrogation by Indian investigators.

The US delegation also cited Headley's plea bargain with the American authorities, under which he is supposed to be granted leniency. Headley is key to 26/11 investigations as he had carried out the recce of targets in Mumbai. Indian investigators last quizzed him in 2010.

However, India may be allowed to question Headley's accomplice, 52-year-old Pakistani-Canadian Tahawwur Hussain Rana, who also helped during the recce.

Later in the day, Union home secretary RK Singh held a meeting with deputy assistant attorney general Bruce Swartz on the issue. Asked



In a departure from his predecessors' practices, Kerry shied away from any engagements with political leaders. According to insiders, Kerry feared that

the BJP might raise the issue of the US denying a visa to party leader and Gujarat CM Narendra Modi.

In a bid to give an impetus to the strategic dialogue between the two countries, Kerry said US vice-president Joe Biden will visit India late next month.

The two sides also discussed the US decision to start peace talks with Afghanistan - a topic India approached with caution. "I think it's an experiment that is being done in order to find an alternative for sustainable peace in Afghanistan. One cannot disagree with that," Khurshid said.

He was assured by Kerry that India's concerns are not 'overlooked or undermined'. US special representative on Afghanistan, James Dobbins, will brief Indian officials on the talks with Taliban on Wednesday.

India's decision to reduce oil imports from Iran were also lauded by Kerry, who called it an 'important step'. He called on Khurshid to ask the Iranians "not to miscalculate American and international commitment" to stopping Iran from pursuing nuclear weapons.

'misinformation on data harvesting'

John Kerry on Monday sought to ally India's concerns on data mining, saying there was enormous amount of misinformation on the issue in his country and the US government was committed to defend civil liberties around the world.

Kerry told reporters at a joint press conference with External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid at the Hyderabad House here that data harvesting has helped avert terror acts and saved lives. Contending there was "enormous amount of misinformation" and "enormous amount of misunderstanding" on the issue in the US, Kerry said he would "proudly" defend the civil liberties of the US, India and other countries of the world.



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