

# India is "vital" to American interests

THE BUSH administration is committed to completing the transformation of the US-India relationship that was set into motion in the past few years, the India Abroad News Service quoted the administration's point person for South Asia as saying.

Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Christina Rocca, addressing the annual national legislative conference of the Indian American Friendship Council in Washington, said: "The first characteristic of this relationship, and the foundation of our policy, is recognition of the vitality and importance of India to American interests."

A second characteristic, she said, "is a new focus on India's economic significance." She predicted that "our interests and efforts will increasingly intersect throughout the world," and expressed confidence that "our shared interests will generally enable the US and India to work closely together."

Rocca acknowledged that

"India's economic potential, following a decade of free-market reforms, is immense," and noted that "India's general technological prowess and, in particular, its leadership in information technology is acknowledged around the world."

But she bemoaned that even though the US is India's largest trading partner, "bilateral trade remains far below what it should be. As for investment, US companies are definitely interested in India -- but again, quite frankly, the investment climate is far from optimal."

"Common global and regional security interests," Rocca said, "comprise a third and very important aspect of US policy toward India."

She said that "as the largest country in the region, India has a role and responsibility to play in helping secure stable, peaceful conditions in South Asia and beyond."

Rocca acknowledged that in this connection, "a review

of our sanctions policy is now underway. And we will need to work closely with Congress to see how the current situation might be changed."

She added that non-proliferation "remains an important goal of the US policy," but explained that Washington wants "to expand and transform our engagement on defense issues, talking more about potential areas of cooperation while continuing to narrow our remaining differences."

Rocca pointed out that "a major change that is already detectable in our security dialogue, I think, is that we are now discussing a much wider range of topics."

She said there would be many other high-level visits to India in the wake of Joint Chiefs of Staffs General Henry Shelton's last week. President Bush, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld "have accepted invitations to visit India," she said.



So near, yet so far: Pakistan's leader, Musharraf failed to conclude an agreement with India's Vajpayee due to differences over Kashmir

## United states to boost India defence ties

GENERAL Henry Shelton, the chairman of the United States' Joint Chiefs of Staff, was quoted by the BBC as saying that his country will revive a joint military planning body with India.

General Shelton, who visited Delhi last week, said

the decision to revive the body was a substantive leap in military ties between the two countries.

The military planning body, which allows both countries to share information on counter-terrorism,

intelligence and military co-operation, had become inactive over the past few years.

The trip by General Shelton is the highest-level US military visit since India carried out nuclear tests in 1998, prompting a reduction

in military-to-military contacts. General Shelton has indicated during his trip that sanctions against India - imposed after the tests - are being reviewed.

On Thursday, General Shelton told journalists he was "delighted" to see a dia-

logue between Pakistan and India.

Ties between Delhi and Washington have been growing closer, and India recently indicated its support for President George W Bush's controversial missile defence plans.

## Landmark summit between Pakistan and India fails over Kashmir

PAKISTAN'S military ruler General Pervez Musharraf said on Friday the peace process with arch rival India was unstoppable, only to be rebuffed by New Delhi for insisting Kashmir be part of any settlement, reported Reuters from Islamabad.

Musharraf told a live televised news conference in Islamabad that although he had returned "empty-handed" from last weekend's summit with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in Agra, India, he still hoped for peace with

India. But it is Kashmir, where India holds about 45 percent, Pakistan a third and China the remainder, that is the major obstacle to any peace agreement.

"I return empty-handed but I am not disappointed because there was tremendous goodwill and understanding which was generated and more than that the resolve to carry forward the...process," he said.

But he stressed the bitter 54-year dispute over the Himalayan region of Kashmir had to be part of any

solution, an issue that India, which claims the whole of Kashmir, flatly rejects.

"Can we bring peace without a resolution to Kashmir? My answer is certainly not, not ever," Musharraf said.

India's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh quickly responded to reiterate New Delhi's claim to the region and criticize Islamabad for sponsoring a rebellion against Indian rule in Kashmir, which New Delhi refers to as "cross-border terrorism." An estimated 30,000

people have died since the Kashmir rebellion began more than a decade ago.

"It is not a disputed territory, it is an integral part of India," Singh said.

"It is disappointing, but in the face of daily killing of innocent men, women and children, terrorism encouraged and abetted from across the Line of Control and from across the border is attempted to be explained away on some really stretched arguments of legalism," Singh added.

India and Pakistan have

fought two of their three wars since independence from Britain in 1947 over Kashmir, but Musharraf said there could be no military solution to the problem.

"The hope I have is, now I feel nobody can stop this (peace) process from moving forward because people will not allow that," he said. "We must learn from history, there is no military solution for the Kashmir issue...we have to understand this reality."

Musharraf said he would formally invite Vajpayee and

Singh to visit Islamabad for a second round of peace talks. Singh did not say whether India would accept the invitation.

Musharraf's comments marked the first time he has publicly spoken about his talks with Vajpayee. He stressed that he wanted to normalize relations with India.

"I went to the summit with a very sincere search for peace. I went to close the chapter of hostility, mistrust, suspicion," he said, adding the ultimate goal was normalization of all political,

economic and social relations with India.

Pakistan argues Kashmir, the majority of whom are Muslim, should choose whether they would rather be governed by Hindu-dominated India or be part of Pakistan, a Muslim nation. India claims the whole of the region for itself.

Musharraf said the Kashmiri people must be included in the process, a proposal that India has so far refused to consider. "Can we reach a resolution of this issue... without the involvement and

wishes of the people of Kashmir?" Musharraf asked. "No, we cannot reach it."

Pakistan on Thursday accused India of apparently backing away from understandings reached at the summit and insisted the two sides build on vows made at the talks.

Vajpayee has held a series of consultations in India with ministers, coalition partners and opposition politicians to explain the tense and confusing end to the summit, generally winning support for his peace moves.

## Megawati takes over as Aceh flares

INDONESIAN lawmakers on Monday elected Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of the country's founding leader, as the fourth president in as many turbulent years, sacking her disgraced predecessor for incompetence, reported Reuters.

The supreme People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) dumped Abdurrahman Wahid just hours after he declared a state of emergency and tried to dissolve the legislature in a desperate pre-dawn bid to hold on to power.

But neighbors Thailand and Singapore welcomed Megawati's rise. Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said the change of president would benefit the entire region. "The more stable Indonesia is, the more the whole region will benefit," he told reporters.

As the MPR decided his fate, Wahid was holed up behind razor wire barricades in the colonial-era presidential palace. It is unclear how Wahid will be forced from the palace. His aides have said he will refuse to stand

aside.

The world's fourth-most populous nation, ruled by autocrats for most of its history, has never had a peaceful transition of power. But there were no immediate signs of unrest on Monday. The country's beleaguered rupiah also rose over 10 percent and stocks hit a 10-month high on Friday.

After taking the oath of office, Megawati read a seven-minute speech urging all sides to accept her election. But a big question mark also hangs over Megawati's

own abilities and those of her new team, which her aides say may not be named for up to a week.

Megawati's party won the most votes in the 1999 parliamentary election but is still well short of a majority. Like Wahid, she will be forced to rely on an inherently unstable series of alliances to serve out her term to 2004.

Many Indonesians hope the change will now allow the country to overcome its enormous political and economic problems. Indonesia's

economy is sputtering along while the rupiah remains at levels too weak to ease the country's huge foreign debt burden.

Fighting among pro-independence fighters and security forces has spiralled out of control in Aceh province, ethnic tensions haunt Indonesia's side of Borneo island and Sulawesi while investors moan about the general breakdown of law and order.

violence in Aceh left 21 people dead on the weekend, after human rights activists warned that the area was on the verge of "all-out war," as the military arrested a negotiating team of the armed opposition Free Aceh Movement. The military claimed the dead were Acehese guerrillas, but the fighters said all but one killed in the firefight were civilians.

The death toll was one of the highest in a single incident this year. Since January, about 900 people - mostly civilians - have died in the bloodshed which escalated sharply after a seven-month truce collapsed. Human rights groups blame government forces for most of the deaths.

Earlier Saturday, New York-based Human Rights Watch warned that the arrest of six rebel negotiators on Friday could trigger "all-out war" in the province on the northern tip of Sumatra Island.

The arrests came two days after their peace talks broke down. Five of the men were charged with treason, while the sixth was released. If convicted, they could be imprisoned for life. The men took part in the negotiations after the government said their safety would be guaranteed.

Sidney Jones, Asia director of Human Rights Watch called for the negotiators to be freed as well. "With the arrests of people whose security it had guaranteed, the Indonesian government is showing that commitments it makes with respect to Aceh are worthless. This could be a signal for all-out war," she said in a statement.

## US manipulated UN to provoke Iraq and justify airstrikes

IN A NEW documentary film, a former United Nations weapons inspector accuses the United States of manipulating the United Nations to provoke a confrontation with Saddam Hussein as a pretext for U.S. airstrikes on Iraq, the Associated Press reported.

Scott Ritter, a former U.S. Marine intelligence officer, says in the 90-minute documentary that he did not provoke the confrontation with the Americans wanted in March 1998, but fellow inspector Roger Hill - an Australian - did have a confrontation in December of that year.

Days later, chief U.N. inspector Richard Butler declared that Iraq was not cooperating with weapons inspectors and the U.S. and Britain launched airstrikes against Iraq in punishment.

U.N. inspectors pulled out of the country ahead of the bombing raids, and Iraq has barred them from returning for more than 2 1/2 years.

Butler, who was Ritter's boss, called the allegations "completely false" and accused Ritter of making "a propaganda film." The U.S. Mission to the United Nations said in a statement Thursday that allegations of collusion were "baseless and false."

The documentary traces

the history of the U.N. Special Commission, known as UNSCOM, which was created by the U.N. Security Council after the 1991 Persian Gulf War to oversee the destruction of Iraq's biological and chemical weapons and the missiles used to deliver them. The council replaced it in December 1999 with a new agency, the U.N. Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission.

By 1995, Ritter said both he and former chief weapons inspector Rolf Ekeus believed Iraq was "fundamentally disarmed." He noted that the head of Iraq's weapons programs - Saddam's son-in-law Hussein Kamal al-Majid - told Ekeus after he defected to Jordan in August 1995 that all of Iraq's banned weapons had been destroyed.

Butler said Ritter had always claimed to him that Iraq's banned weapons had not been destroyed. "Either he was misleading me when on the job or he is now misleading the public in his role as a film producer," Butler told the AP. "This film will hopefully compel people to start ... taking a harder look at Iraq's disarmament" and then confronting the issue of lifting sanctions, he said.

Ritter resigned from UNSCOM in August 1998, denouncing the Clinton administration for having

withdrawn support for the U.N. agency and undermining weapons inspection.

He has since said Washington used UNSCOM to spy on Iraq - a longtime charge by Baghdad. In the documentary, he repeated the spying charge and made new allegations. On either Feb. 28 or March 1, 1998, Ritter said he and Butler attended a meeting with then U.S. Ambassador Bill Richardson at the U.S. Mission to the U.N., hours before he left for Baghdad to lead an inspection mission. Ritter said Butler drew a line on a blackboard with the UNSCOM timeline for the inspection on one side and the U.S. timeline for military action on the other side, and then told him: "You have to provoke a confrontation ... so the U.S. can start bombing" before March 15, a Muslim holy period.

In Baghdad, Ritter said the Iraqis at first refused to allow his team to carry out orders to search the Ministry of Defense. At that moment, then U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was attending a meeting in Paris, prepared to tell the French why the United States was undertaking military action, he told reporters later. But the military strikes were called off when the Iraqis later allowed the inspectors in, he said.



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