

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

June 2, 2010

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President Obama Expresses Concern, Regret over Israeli Ship Raid

Washington — President Obama supports a U.N. Security Council statement that condemns an Israeli raid on a humanitarian aid flotilla headed for Gaza and calls for a full investigation, White House press secretary Robert Gibbs says.

At a White House briefing June 1, Gibbs said the president spoke three times with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on May 31 about the incident. The president also expressed “deep regret” at the loss of life and of those wounded in the raid, he said.

Gibbs added that the United States and international community support the U.N. Security Council statement that said: “The Security Council deeply regrets the loss of life and injuries resulting from the use of force during the Israeli military operation in international waters against the convoy sailing to Gaza. The council in this context condemns those acts, which resulted in the loss of at least 10 civilians and many wounded, and expresses its condolences to their families. The Security Council requests the immediate release of the ships, as well as civilians held by Israel.”

And Gibbs also said “the statement that I read calls for an investigation that is prompt, impartial, credible and transparent, conforming to international standards, of exactly what happened. And we're obviously supportive of that.”

Early on May 31, a flotilla of six cargo ships and passenger boats carrying humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip was intercepted by the Israeli military after repeated warnings. During a raid on one of the ships, the Turkish ship Mavi Marmara, at least 10 civilians were killed, according to news accounts.

“The president also expressed the importance of learning all the facts and circumstances around this morning’s tragic events as soon as possible,” the White House said in a May 31 summary of a telephone conversation between Obama and Netanyahu. Netanyahu had been scheduled to meet with Obama May 31 in Washington on a number of issues before the incident.

State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said that the United States is working to ascertain the facts and expects that the Israeli government will conduct a full and credible investigation.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu held talks with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton at the State Department June 1, and had told reporters ahead of

their meeting that Turkey wanted a strong statement from the United States.

The United States has worked closely with the Israeli government, the Palestinian Authority, international nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations to provide adequate access for humanitarian goods, including reconstruction materials, through established border crossings while recognizing security concerns, Crowley said.

“However, Hamas’ interference with international assistance shipments and work of nongovernmental organizations, and its use and endorsement of violence, complicates efforts in Gaza,” Crowley said.

Ambassador Alejandro Wolff, deputy permanent U.S. representative to the United Nations, said during an emergency session of the U.N. Security Council May 31 that this incident underscores the need to move ahead quickly with talks that can lead to a comprehensive peace in the region. The United States has been conducting indirect talks with the Israelis and Palestinians aimed at restarting direct Middle East peace talks.

“The only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an agreement, negotiated between the parties, that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and fulfills the aspirations of both parties for independent homelands through two states for two peoples, Israel and an independent, contiguous and viable state of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security,” Wolff said.

U.S. Clean Energy Trade Mission Visits Indonesia

Together, a cleaner energy future is possible, Secretary Locke says

By Andrew Malandrino
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States and Indonesia can work together on clean energy development that benefits businesses in both countries and creates a more sustainable environment, U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke says.

“The health of the environment and health of the economy go hand-in-hand, and the United States is committed to actively partnering with the Republic of Indonesia on issues of vast importance to our two nations,” Locke said at a May 26 event in Muara Baru, a fishing port in North Jakarta.

Locke was in Jakarta with representatives of 10 U.S. clean energy companies as part of the Obama administration’s first Cabinet-level trade mission. The 10-day mission previously visited Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing, where Locke participated in the U.S.-China Strategic and

Economic Dialogue.

Witnessing the signing of the Indonesia-U.S. Ocean Exploration Partnership, Locke said the pact is an "important step in a broader U.S.-Indonesia collaboration on science and technology."

The first agreement of its kind, according to the Commerce Department, the partnership focuses exploration resources in the Indonesian Exclusive Economic Zone and surrounding oceans. Through a better understanding of the marine environment, the two countries expect to improve ocean management and conservation, and enhance public understanding of Indonesia's unique ocean resources.

COOPERATION ON CLEAN ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

"By mid-century, global energy use is likely to double," Locke told a group of students from the University of Indonesia's Depok campus in southern Jakarta May 26. "Both Indonesia and the United States can benefit from cooperating on clean energy development," Locke said. "The potential for new business and new job creation is simply enormous."

The 10 U.S. companies represented in Locke's trade mission "are at the vanguard of a movement to meet the world's clean energy needs," said Locke. Meetings with Indonesian business and government representatives identified new opportunities for cooperation between U.S. businesses and their Indonesian counterparts.

Energy produced from clean sources accounts for 7 percent of Indonesia's current energy-generating capacity. The country has pledged to achieve 15 percent by 2025. Locke told students that U.S. companies "can help Indonesia meet its ambitious energy efficiency goals while also spurring the creation of new jobs here and in the United States."

However, "Many of the technologies needed to successfully cope with climate change and carbon reduction simply don't exist yet," he said.

"That's where the students, researchers and the scientists of the University of Indonesia come in. The United States, Indonesia and the entire world are counting on bright, motivated people like all of you to discover these new energy technologies," Locke said. "With your talent, your creativity and your ingenuity, you can be a leader in the effort to combat climate change. And certainly, the university's green campus initiative — with its focus on global warming — will be an important catalyst for action."

"You can be the innovators and entrepreneurs that help

us build a 21st century, clean energy economy," the secretary of commerce told the students.

After a meeting with Indonesian Minister of Trade Mari Pangestu, Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Hatta Rajasa and several other Indonesian officials and business representatives, Locke told the American Chamber of Commerce in Jakarta, "U.S. businesses on our trade mission look forward to pursuing new business opportunities in Indonesia that will benefit the economies of both our countries while creating a more sustainable environment."

The fastest-growing sector of the \$6 trillion global energy market is clean, green energy. With 40 percent of the world's known geothermal resources, Indonesia "has tremendous potential to tap biomass, hydropower, wind and solar resources." By bringing together U.S. and Indonesian know-how, "there is also tremendous potential in helping Indonesia more efficiently use all of its energy resources," Locke said.

"This is our chance to join together to write a new chapter — a better, more hopeful chapter — in the world's history," he said.

India an Indispensable Partner, U.S. Officials Say

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama has called India an "indispensable" partner for the United States in the 21st century, a senior American diplomat says.

"India matters to the United States because it's the world's largest democracy, but has the world's second-fastest growing economy and an economy that is a very important source of exports for the United States ... and also because it is an increasingly important partner for the United States in addressing common global concerns," says Robert Blake, assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs.

India's growing role is why President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton decided early in 2009 to elevate relations by establishing a strategic dialogue, Blake said at a May 28 press briefing.

The comprehensive U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue meets June 1-4 in Washington. It will be chaired by Clinton and Indian External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna at the State Department. The dialogue provides high-level participation; briefings by the co-chairs to members of both administrations; and an opportunity for firsthand talks.

Blake said the purpose of this dialogue is to think

strategically and to get the key people who work on these issues together to think ahead and also to plan for Obama's visit to India.

The strategic dialogue will meet annually, alternating between New Delhi and Washington, and will continue to be chaired by Clinton and Krishna. It was first announced at a meeting in Washington July 20, 2009.

It will cover a range of issues, from common security interests and defense cooperation to nuclear nonproliferation, education, climate change and energy security. The dialogue is not limited to the two governments; it will include the private sector and academia.

Establishing a strategic dialogue between the United States and India represents a significant step in their bilateral relations and an important acknowledgement of India's increasing role in global affairs, Blake said in his briefing.

Obama spoke with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on May 28 to discuss the upcoming U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue, the White House said in a statement. "President Obama and Prime Minister Singh also expressed their hope that the dialogue will initiate a regular exchange of ideas and discussion between their governments and both pledged their support toward that end," the statement said.

As a result of the global Nuclear Security Summit hosted by Obama in April, Singh pledged to build a center for nuclear security that will provide training for countries from a number of regions, Blake said. Singh also played an important role at Copenhagen climate change talks in December 2009 during a critical phase of the negotiations, he added.

Food security is also a new area of cooperation, Blake said. India will become a strong partner in efforts to enhance global food security initiatives.

"On health, we have established or are in the process of establishing a global disease-detection center that has the potential to be one of the flagship science and technology ventures between the United States and India in which our joint researchers will be able to study and hopefully find cures for some of the major global pandemic diseases," Blake said.

Blake said that on June 2 there will be both private-sector and government meetings, including the U.S.-India Business Council, which will be holding its 35th annual meeting. At the government level, Under Secretary of State William Burns and Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao will oversee a wide-ranging foreign policy

dialogue that will include Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Middle East, probably China, and a number of other regional concerns.

The main strategic dialogue will be held June 3, with Clinton and Krishna leading the talks.

"It will be the first time that our two governments are going to have ... a whole-of-government conversation, about not so much what we've accomplished but to look ahead about what we can accomplish and particularly look ahead to the president's visit sometime this fall to India," Blake said.

Exploring the Fabric of Everyday Life in South Asia

New exhibit at U.S. museum provides insight into region's quilts

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — Visitors in the U.S. prairie city of Lincoln, Nebraska, are touring some of the cultures of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan through their quilts.

Quilt making is a well-known and valued tradition in the United States. An institute at the University of Nebraska, the International Quilt Study Center, has been working for more than a decade to expand the understanding of quilted fabrics from around the world. It opened a museum two years ago, and its new exhibit, running through November 7, explores quilting textile traditions in South Asia.

India has been known for centuries for its fine printed textiles, and textile experts have studied the rich fabrics and clothing of its maharajahs' courts, said Marin F. Hanson, the museum's curator of exhibitions. India's quilts are far less known. "All over the world, quilted textiles have been the least studied textiles because they've really been the folk art," she said.

Hanson emphasized that the exhibit, like others at the museum, is about more than the quilts, as appealing as they might be. She said the goal "is to help visitors think about other societies and other people through this medium, through this metaphor of textiles."

For this exhibit, the museum relied on the expertise of Patricia Stoddard, an American who lived in Pakistan for several years and wrote the first book on quilts from the region. The museum owns quilts from her collection from Pakistan and the neighboring northwestern Indian state of Gujarat. Also included in the exhibit are quilts from eastern India and Bangladesh collected over two years by museum researcher Patrick Finn, who documented their production and uses; and from a collector and researcher in Mumbai, India.

Hanson said the quilts are the fabrics of everyday life, but that “everyday life” has a broader meaning than most Americans might suspect. A quilt might be used as a bedcovering, as in the United States; it might be spread on the ground for a seating area; it might be hung in a doorway; it might provide padding on a cart seat or a cover for the cart’s cargo; or it might serve as a cushion for the bride and groom in a wedding ceremony. “Women still work on their dowries, and these quilts are often part of their dowries,” Hanson said.

The quilts of South Asia vary as much as the region’s cuisines do, Hanson said. The top of a kantha quilt from Bangladesh or India’s West Bengal or Bihar will typically be a solid piece of cloth — an old sari or dhoti, the garment of a woman or a man — rather than pieces of cloth stitched together. It will be heavily covered in embroidered images, perhaps including fish, to represent bounty, or a Hindu temple chariot, or a Bengal tiger, or a peacock. “They completely cover the surface of this whole cloth,” Hanson said. “It’s sort of mind-boggling.”

In the western India state of Maharastra, the saris are different — typically a fairly plain gray, but with a brightly colored border — and the stitching is done with the thread laboriously unwound from the borders. Hanson said the recycling of fabric is the norm for Indian quilts, which also use worn-out saris and dhotis as their layers of filling. “You do what you can with what you have,” she said.

(Contrary to popular perceptions, she said, American quilts from even as far back as the colonial period, before 1776, often were made of pieces of new cloth. “The idea of thrift in quilting is complicated,” she said.)

The ralli quilts from western India and Pakistan are more typically pieced together from many scraps, with cut-out pieces appliquéd on top as well as embroidery and the inclusion of sequins and tiny mirrors. The motifs might include animals such as peacocks, elephants and camels, and symbols such as the tree of life.

It’s not only people’s blankets that are quilted. The exhibit includes decorative coverings made for camels and bullocks by the Rabari people in the desert region of Kutch, in Gujarat. Bullock coverings are designed to accommodate the Brahma bull’s distinctive hump, Hanson said.

Hanson said the Nebraska center has begun to explore Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan for their quilts, and she hopes to travel through China in hopes of documenting the quilting traditions there. “This exhibition is really just the beginning, I think, of finding out about quilted textiles from all over this part of the world,” she said.

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