

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

October 25, 2010

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United States and Pakistan Strengthen Strategic Relations

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — Significant things can be accomplished between partners through listening to each other and learning from each other, says Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. That approach has characterized the latest round of the U.S.-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue.

It is the third meeting of the strategic dialogue this year between the two partners and is designed to show a commitment to strengthening the relationship based on values, mutual respect, trust and interests, Clinton said.

“We came together in this strategic dialogue to discuss how to help the Pakistani people in the areas that Pakistani people themselves had identified as their more important concerns,” Clinton said at a news briefing with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi at the State Department October 22.

The United States will provide a multiyear security assistance commitment to Pakistan. President Obama will ask Congress to fund \$2 billion in foreign military assistance for the years 2012 to 2016 to help step up the fight against extremists there and in neighboring Afghanistan, Clinton said.

This will complement \$7.5 billion in civilian projects over five years that has already been approved by Congress, Clinton added. The new military assistance is for purchasing U.S.-made arms, ammunition and accessories and is designed to help bolster Pakistani efforts against Taliban extremists and al-Qaida terrorist affiliates holed up in the mountainous region that separates Pakistan and Afghanistan. It replaces a similar package begun in 2005 that expired October 1 this year.

“Pakistan and the U.S. need to cooperate more closely in bringing stability and peace in Afghanistan,” Qureshi said. “We also hope that our consultation and cooperation on issues of regional peace, security and stability will continue to make a salutary impact on the overall environment.”

Qureshi said the strategic dialogue is a reflection of the broad range of areas in which “we want and need to work together to broaden and deepen our multifaceted cooperation and to advance our shared goal of building a strategic partnership.” He thanked the United States for its assistance during the devastating floods that destroyed homes, farms and businesses, affected 21 million people and caused long-term damage to Pakistan’s infrastructure and economy.

“The United States was very proud working with the Pakistani government and military to help with the rescue operations and to help pick up thousands and thousands of stranded Pakistanis and to deliver millions of pounds of refugee supplies, as well as \$390 million in relief and recovery aid,” Clinton said. The assistance has not ended and will continue into full reconstruction and recovery, she added.

Clinton and Qureshi co-chaired the dialogue, which was held October 20 to 22.

The Obama administration has begun using strategic dialogues as a means for deeper consultations and commitment among select nations. The dialogues are designed to respond to the specific needs of partner nations and enhance cooperation in critical areas.

Delegates from Pakistan and the United States met in 13 working groups to expand cooperation in strengthening democratic institutions, agriculture and food security, communications, water resources, energy security, health care, women’s empowerment, economic trade and investment, and recovery and reconstruction after the devastating floods earlier in the year. The talks underscored the specific purpose of this session of the dialogue — which will rotate between Islamabad and Washington — to identify issues and how best to address them.

Clinton said the working groups have settled on an action plan for Pakistan that is a blueprint for cooperation.

“We now have a plan to immunize against disease 90 percent of Pakistani children. We have a plan to improve the reliability of electricity supply to the Pakistani people,” Clinton told reporters. “And yesterday [October 21], we began distributing wheat and vegetable seed as part of a broader plan to help half a million farming families get back on their feet.”

In addition, working groups have devised a plan to enhance the country’s existing energy infrastructure and develop new sources of power, and equipment has been ordered for four power plants, Clinton said. A public-private partnership is being completed to build a 150-megawatt wind farm in Sindh province that will draw on the potential of winds that blow down the Pakistani coastline.

“Working groups have also been involved in collaborating on new scientific projects, in fact 27 new projects, including research on deadly diseases like hepatitis and tuberculosis, with joint funding from both governments,” Clinton said.

Water experts from Pakistani provinces will soon visit New Orleans in the United States to study the flood relief and reconstruction that followed Hurricane Katrina in 2005, she added.

United States Responds to Cholera Outbreak in Haiti

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. government is working rapidly to respond to a cholera outbreak in northwestern Haiti that officials fear could lead to a countrywide epidemic.

“Everyone’s working aggressively because we understand the potential danger posed by this outbreak,” State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said to reporters October 22.

Crowley said cholera already had killed at least 150 people and infected more than 1,500 others and was continuing to spread.

An acute intestinal infection, cholera causes diarrhea and vomiting, and can quickly lead to severe dehydration and death. It is caused by ingestion of contaminated food or water, and transmission is closely linked to inadequate sanitation and environmental management lapses.

“We’re providing oral rehydration salt treatment kits and we are helping with an intensive public health information campaign on hygiene and proper water sanitation,” Crowley said.

The consequences of a disaster such as the Haiti earthquake, including disruption of water and sanitation systems and the displacement of populations to inadequate and overcrowded camps, can increase the risk of cholera transmission if the bacteria are present or introduced.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is partnering with entities such as the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to respond to the cholera outbreak.

PAHO’s deputy director, Dr. Jon Andrus, said that in addition to treating those who have already been infected, efforts to improve health standards are key to preventing further spread of the disease.

“Ultimately, we want to prevent cases by implementing sound water and sanitation measures. Community mobilization and education on washing hands and safe water will be critical to stopping transmission,” Andrus said October 21.

So far, Haitian government officials have confirmed cases of cholera only in the northwestern Artibonite province, just north of the capital city, Port-au-Prince. However, Andrus said the disease will likely continue to spread. But he added that with proper treatment, such as intravenous hydration and antibiotics, mortality rates could decrease to less than 1 percent of those infected.

“The challenge for Haiti will be to ensure all severe infections are adequately cared for. One of the benefits of the response to the earthquake is that most people feel that citizens have better access to health services. This access will need to be further enhanced in the initial phases of this outbreak,” Andrus said.

In January, a powerful magnitude 7.0 earthquake devastated Haiti, killing more than 200,000 people and causing catastrophic damage to Haiti’s infrastructure.

In the weeks and months after the earthquake, more than 1.5 million internally displaced Haitians settled in temporary sites throughout the country. Haiti’s Ministry of Health partnered with groups such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, PAHO and the World Health Organization to address acute health needs and pervasive threats associated with crowded and unhygienic living conditions. The agencies established a system of disease surveillance using fixed health facilities and mobile clinics, which helped find these cases.

The cholera outbreak is the first of its kind in Haiti since the earthquake.

On Election Day, U.S. Voters Find More than Candidates on Ballot

By Michelle Brooks
Staff Writer

Washington — When American voters head to the polls November 2, many are not just selecting their future leaders. They are weighing in on a variety of issues, including how their taxes are spent or what rights their state constitutions guarantee.

Ballot measures, including initiatives and referendums, give voters an opportunity to enact or repeal laws, endorse proposed laws, determine how funds will be raised or spent and approve or reject constitutional amendments.

On Election Day 2010, voters in 36 states will decide on 159 ballot measures, according to the Initiative and Referendum Institute, part of the University of Southern California School of Law. This number is comparable to that in the 2008 elections, but considerably lower than in the 2004 and 2006 elections.

Most of the issues voters will consider were placed on the ballot by state legislatures. Many state constitutions require certain measures to go before the electorate before they can move forward.

In 24 states, citizens can put forth initiatives, usually proposals that have garnered a minimum number of signatures on a petition by a specified time in advance of Election Day. In eight states, petitions for legislative action first are submitted to the state legislature, which can choose to act on the petition itself or allow the voters to decide.

Referendums also are allowed in 24 states. A referendum — a relatively rare measure — is a proposal to repeal or enact a law, or to recall an elected official. In 2010, one referendum will be on the ballot: South Dakota voters will have an opportunity to expand a ban on smoking in certain places.

ESPECIALLY COMMON IN CALIFORNIA, OREGON

Each state has its own rules governing how ballot measures are placed before the voters, but there are many common requirements, such as a mandatory minimum number of petition signatures and well-publicized deadlines for submission.

Between 1904 and 2009, some 2,314 initiatives appeared on state ballots; 41 percent were approved by the voters, according to the Initiative and Referendum Institute's data.

Oregon and California have voted on the most measures, with 354 and 340, respectively. In 2010, they are again among the states with the most initiatives.

Two California measures are garnering national attention. Proposition 19, if passed, would make California the first state to legalize recreational marijuana use by allowing people ages 21 and older to possess up to an ounce (28 grams) of the drug. A recent USC/Los Angeles Times poll suggests a majority of voters oppose the measure.

The other is Proposition 23, in which voters will decide whether to suspend the state's greenhouse gas reduction law until the state's high unemployment rate — now at 12.3 percent — drops below 5.5 percent for four consecutive quarters to show a sustained strong job market. Polls suggest the electorate is split about the initiative.

State and national lawmakers pay attention to ballot measures, some of which can be a good indicator of how strongly the electorate feels about controversial issues such as gay marriage and abortion.

Health care appears to be an important issue in the 2010 elections. Voters in several states will have an opportunity to cast a "symbolic vote" against President Obama's health care law passed by Congress earlier in 2010. The vote is symbolic because state actions — such as rejection of mandatory participation in a health insurance system — generally cannot override federal law.

OTHER NOTABLE BALLOT MEASURES

Another common entry on ballots affects how states raise and spend money.

In Oregon, voters will consider extending the duration of a lottery program that funds conservation activities. In Massachusetts, voters will be asked whether to reduce the state sales tax from 6.25 percent to 3 percent.

Citizens often use ballot measures as a way to change electoral practices. Voters in New Mexico and Oklahoma will have an opportunity to set term limits on certain elected positions. In Florida, voters will consider eliminating public funding of campaigns.

Ballot measures related to animals — many promoted by animal rights groups — are becoming increasingly common, the institute says. Missouri's Proposition B would set minimum space requirements for dog breeding.

One of the more unusual measures this year is in the nation's smallest state, Rhode Island, officially named "The State of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations." Voters will decide whether to amend the state's constitution to shorten the name to "The State of Rhode Island."

The current official name arose from the merger of two colonies in the 18th century. Supporters of the measure say the word "plantations" is too closely connected to slavery.

There is no provision for nationwide ballot measures in the United States. It would take an amendment to the U.S. Constitution for this to be an option.

Democracy in Latin America: a Focus on Challenges Ahead

By Christopher Connell
Special Correspondent

Washington — The conference that drew Latin American leaders from all walks of life to a college campus in California was billed as a celebration of 200 years of independence for the region.

However, the focus at the Institute of the Americas was not on past triumphs, but on the difficulties that many countries face today in strengthening democracy and the rule of law.

As Dominican Republic President Leonel Fernandez said, "The transition to democracy has been a success story for all of Latin America." But democracy, he added, is still "in its infancy in Latin America." There are free elections and freedom of expression, but now "people want economic progress. What is missing in Latin America ... is a combination of the principles of liberal democracy with the aspiration of social justice."

The institute, a nonprofit organization housed at the University of California, San Diego, that promotes development, trade and good governance, gave Fernandez its Award for Democracy and Peace, making him the 12th Latin leader to receive the honor since it was bestowed on Argentine President Raúl Alfonsín in 1987.

The weeklong workshop, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State and the Latin development bank CAF, drew 50 participants from 15 countries to examine issues crucial to the region's future, including human rights, freedom of the press, organized crime and the role of indigenous communities, as well as post-Castro Cuba, the Chavez regime in Venezuela and the efforts to restore democracy after the 2009 coup in Honduras.

Among the participants were the mayor-elect of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, and the mayor of Choluteca, Honduras; Paraguay's vice minister of education; indigenous leaders representing the Mapuche of Chile, the Aymara of Bolivia, and the Mixteca of Mexico; civil society leaders such as two-time Olympic race walk medalist Jefferson Perez, whose foundation helps low-income youth in his native Ecuador; and journalists from some of the region's leading newspapers, including La Nación of Buenos Aires and El Deber of Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

They came together during the bicentennial of the year that Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Mexico secured independence from Spain.

Eduardo Stein Barillas, former vice president of Guatemala, told of his efforts as head of a truth and reconciliation commission for Honduras to help that country find a path out of the crisis that ensued after the overthrow of President Manuel Zelaya in June 2009. He also spoke on a panel with former Bolivian President Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga and former Costa Rican Vice President Kevin Casas-Zamora on the topic "Who governs and who gives the orders?"

Stein sees an alarming weakening of democracy in several countries, including his own, "because many

governments and presidents think that because they won the elections, they are entitled to change the rules."

"It's like this saying in Buenos Aires: 'Power is like the violin: You take it with the left, but you play it with the right,'" he said in an interview. "Indeed, they become rather authoritarian, neutralizing or trying to control the judiciary, Congress and other powers."

"We inherited from the French Revolution a system of government in which the three powers of the state are supposed to balance each other. In several countries in Latin America this is not the case, and the executive branch is always trying to control Congress and ... the judiciary," Stein said. "That is very dangerous."

The participants returned often to the question of how to stop the drug violence that has claimed 28,000 lives in Mexico since the end of 2006.

Efren Elias Galaviz, manager of external affairs and public policy for MSD Mexico, a subsidiary of the pharmaceutical firm Merck, said, "To me it's very clear that we need better political and social institutions — including a solid justice system and trained police — if we want to recover our countries for ourselves and not for the drug traffickers."

"We also need more jobs and more education," said Elias, who said gangs can hire a gunman for just 800 pesos a week, or \$50.

Craig Kelly, a former U.S. ambassador to Chile, said much has changed for the better in Latin America over the past 30 years.

Back then, said Kelly, now a vice president of the Cohen Group, a consulting firm, "you had widespread authoritarian governments, you had insurgencies in many countries, you had macroeconomic policies which were not delivering for the citizens." Today, both democracies and economies in the region are much stronger. Forty million people have escaped poverty in the past decade, he said.

Kelly, who helped negotiate the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord that established a framework for Honduras' return to democracy, said the positive trends do not get as much coverage as the drug war or controversies with Cuba and Venezuela, but "every day our hemisphere is more and more integrated, and every day the United States is more integrated with the rest of the hemisphere."

Jeffrey Davidow, the institute's president, said poverty and limited opportunity still pose "an inherent challenge to democracy" that needs to be addressed.

“Overall the trend towards democratic societies has been a good one,” said Davidow, a former U.S. ambassador to Mexico and Venezuela. But “no one can take for granted the continuation of democratic expansion on the continent.”

United States to Boost Production of Biofuels

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. government plans to ramp up production and use of biofuels to help lessen the country’s dependence on foreign oil, create new jobs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced October 21 that the government will pay farmers to produce nonfood crops that can be refined into fuel and sold at fuel stations. The government will defray as much as 75 percent of startup costs for farmers who sign up for the program.

He also said that federal assistance will be available to construct five new biorefineries or bioenergy plants in rural America, and that matching funds will be used to get 10,000 biofuel pumps and storage sites installed over the next five years.

The secretary’s announcement came a week after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said it would allow sales of fuel containing up to 15 percent ethanol (E15) for auto model year 2007 and newer cars and light trucks. The EPA said it expects to make a decision soon on expanding the use of E15 in vehicles going back to model year 2001.

The Energy Independence and Security Act passed by Congress in 2007 calls for 36 billion gallons (136 billion liters) of renewable fuel to be produced annually in the United States by 2022. That means the country must triple its production between now and then and that higher blends of ethanol — a corn-based ingredient that can be mixed with regular gasoline — must become more widely available, along with so-called advanced fuels produced from other crops.

Biofuel, like its fossil gasoline and diesel companions, creates greenhouse gas emissions. But the biofuel “carbon footprint” is just 40 percent to 80 percent that of traditional gasoline, depending on the product and how it’s produced.

President Obama has pledged to reduce oil imports and to create new and cleaner energy markets and jobs. The push for biofuels is one of many programs under way to meet those goals.

The Renewable Fuels Association, a trade group representing producers, estimates that the 10.6 billion gallons (40 billion liters) of ethanol used in the United States in 2009 reduced greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles by 16.5 million tons. That’s equivalent to taking 2.7 million vehicles off the road, the group said.

Last year, production of renewable fuels supported nearly 400,000 U.S. jobs, adding \$53.3 billion to the gross domestic product, the association reported.

In addition to the new policies aimed at vehicles, the U.S. Agriculture Department and the Federal Aviation Administration have signed a new, five-year agreement to develop crops that can be processed into jet fuel for the airline industry.

“I believe the need for energy security, a cleaner environment and better economic opportunity in rural America make the case for immediate action,” Vilsack said in an October 21 speech in Washington.

MORE ADVANCED BIOFUELS NEEDED

To meet the renewable fuel standard mandated by Congress, Vilsack said the nation must move aggressively to develop more advanced sources of biofuel such as cellulosic ethanol, biofuel produced from wood, grasses and nonedible parts of plants; and biobutenol, an alcohol similar to ethanol that is produced when corn, sugar beets and other crops are fermented.

He also asked Congress to extend a tax credit for traditional ethanol producers that expires at the end of 2010.

Some environmental groups have criticized the program, saying that taxpayers are spending billions of dollars to support the corn and ethanol industries even though the fuel does not provide a significant reduction in emissions. “Not all biofuels are created equal,” said Daniel Lashof, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council’s Climate Center.

According to the EPA, ethanol produced from corn at a modern refinery powered by biogas can represent a 20 percent greenhouse gas reduction compared with regular gasoline. Advanced fuels double or triple that.

With U.S. energy consumption expected to grow 50 percent by 2035 and with foreign oil now accounting for 60 percent of the market, Vilsack said the nation must change course.

“Today, we still send a billion dollars a day outside our shores helping other countries’ economies grow while our own economy recovers from a deep recession,” he said.

“With the disastrous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, we are also reminded that the development of our own oil resources is not without environmental or economic risk. We can do better. We have to do better.”

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