

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Secretary Clinton Urges Restraint in Bahrain, Offers Help to Egypt

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton telephoned Bahrain's foreign minister, Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed al-Khalifa, to express U.S. concerns over violence by Bahraini security forces against anti-government protesters and urged that the perpetrators be held responsible.

Speaking in Washington February 17, Clinton said she had telephoned the foreign minister earlier in the day and "emphasized how important it was" that Friday prayers and the funerals of the victims that will be held February 18 "not be marred by violence."

According to press reports, five people died and 231 were injured early February 17 when police broke up a camp in the capital, Manama, that was inhabited by demonstrators who are seeking political reforms.

Just as it has said in response to political unrest elsewhere in the region, the United States "strongly opposes the use of violence and strongly supports reform that moves toward democratic institution-building and economic openness," Clinton said.

Describing Bahrain as a longtime U.S. friend and ally, the secretary said, "There have been reform steps taken" by Bahrain's government, and the Obama administration would like to see reforms continue and be strengthened. "We believe that all people have universal rights, including the right to peaceful assembly," she said.

She called for the Bahraini government to show restraint and to hold accountable "those who have utilized excessive force against peaceful demonstrators." The secretary also urged the country to "return to a process that will result in real, meaningful changes for the people."

U.S. SEEKING TO HELP EGYPT WITH DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

Clinton also announced that the Obama administration is reprogramming \$150 million in assistance to Egypt to support the country's political transition and is sending Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns and David Lipton, the White House senior adviser on international economics, to consult with their Egyptian counterparts.

"It's very clear that there's a great deal of work ahead to ensure an orderly, democratic transition. It's also clear

that Egypt will be grappling with immediate and long-term economic challenges," Clinton said.

The United States "stands ready to provide assistance to Egypt to advance its efforts," she said.

The reprogrammed funding, Clinton said, will help position the United States to "support the transition there and assist with their economic recovery," as well as to give the Obama administration "flexibility to respond to Egyptian needs moving forward."

Clinton said Burns and Lipton will visit Egypt during the week of February 20 and their consultations with Egyptian leaders will focus on "how we can most effectively deploy our assistance in line with their priorities."

Mark Toner, the State Department's acting deputy spokesman, said February 17 that recent political unrest in the country had "a very real economic impact."

As Egypt moves toward holding free elections, the United States wants to be "positioned to bolster those efforts and to help in any kind of way," he said.

Burns and Lipton intend to talk with Egyptian authorities and political groups to get a better assessment of what Egypt's needs are, Toner said.

Egyptian Americans Hopeful for Emerging Democracy in Homeland

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — Egyptian Americans, proud of the victory of pro-democracy protesters in Egypt, are looking to the future of their homeland with a mix of optimism and hope, with a dash of realism.

As protesters marched for democracy in Cairo, Kais Menoufy, head of Delegata Corporation and founder of the Building Bridges exchange initiative, took action by starting Building Egypt: An Egyptian-American Workgroup.

"We want to get the [Egyptian] policymakers and even the elected officials to start to know how to manage government and how to create bills," Menoufy said. Menoufy is reaching out to the California State Senate and the McGeorge School of Law to discuss how Egyptians and Americans can make this happen.

"We are so excited about what is happening in Egypt, and we are looking forward to dialogue," Menoufy said. "My personal belief is that a free Egypt will bring a stronger

ally and a stronger partner to peace in the Middle East and provide stability for the whole region.”

Ahmed Fathi, a regional coordinator for the Alliance of Egyptian Americans, said he received congratulatory phone calls from Americans all around the country when Hosni Mubarak resigned after three decades as president.

“My phone just kept ringing and ringing,” Fathi said, adding that he even received calls from Europe. As celebrations in Egypt, America and around the world wind down, Fathi said the work of building a new democracy needs to begin.

“We can’t lose our focus; although we are all ecstatic and jubilant at the moment, we have to open the political process so we can enable the pro-democracy candidates to emerge,” Fathi said. “The people have demanded the removal of the regime, the removal of a military-style dictatorship that has ruled Egypt since the military coup in 1952, and move it into an open, free and democratic society.”

Fathi, who has worked on projects in Egypt on civil society development, said the American government should support Egyptian pro-democracy and civil society organizations. Egyptian Americans – many of whom are leaders in science, technology and business – want to get involved.

“We can support them with technical know-how, help to bring their voices to the world, maybe do fundraising,” Fathi said.

Maram Abdelhamid, a political consultant based near Washington, said that Egyptian Americans can support Egyptian democracy as a clearer picture emerges.

“I do not believe we have a role now, until the democracy governance work comes in,” Abdelhamid said. “Because we hold both cultures, we can go in and we can help out.”

Abdelhamid, who has experience with political campaigns, said all voices need to be heard in Egypt as it transitions to democracy.

“I think that there needs to be a discussion with every one of the stakeholders,” Abdelhamid said. “I think the political parties that are new and old, the intellectuals and the people who hold the history and knowledge of Egypt, they need to be part of the process.”

Tarek Elhabashy, a barber in northern Virginia, said Egypt’s future is bright because of the national unity that was displayed in Cairo’s Tahrir Square during the protests.

“I saw Muslims and Christians praying together during the protests. When the Muslims prayed, Christians stood around them to protect them and when the Christians prayed, the Muslims stood around them to protect them,” Elhabashy said. “That means the Egyptian people at their core are not discriminatory and want to live with each other peacefully.”

Elhabashy, who aspires to open a barber shop back in his native land, said that Egyptians will work together to build a stronger country.

“I hope that Egypt transforms into a democratic country that respects everyone,” Elhabashy said. “It was so hard for them to achieve change because of the police and the violence ... even after that happened, the people expressed themselves in a peaceful way.”

Magdy Ahmed, a parking attendant in northern Virginia, said that Egypt should re-examine its constitution now that the regime has fallen.

“I would like to see in Egypt things applied like we have here in the American Constitution, such as freedom of expression and equality between all people,” Ahmed said.

U.S., Russian Scientists Researching North Pacific Volcanoes

By Domenick DiPasquale
Staff Writer

Washington – Building on 20 years of productive collaboration, scientists from the United States and Russia are planning the next steps in researching the dynamic geological forces at work in a 4,000-kilometer arc stretching from the Kamchatka Peninsula in the Russian Far East across the Aleutian Islands chain to mainland Alaska.

That area spanning two continents has experienced major geological cataclysms, including the past century’s largest volcanic eruption – Alaska’s Mount Katmai in 1912 – and second-strongest earthquake, a magnitude 9.2 quake that hit Alaska in 1964. That earthquake generated a tsunami wave that rose to a peak of 67 meters in part of Alaska and whose waves reached the Hawaiian city of Hilo several thousand kilometers away. In Russia, three or four of Kamchatka’s 29 volcanoes are usually active at any given time, with several eruptions per year powerful enough to spew volcanic ash and rock high enough into the atmosphere to obstruct commercial aviation routes.

In view of such potentially disastrous threats, John Eichelberger, program coordinator of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Volcano Hazards Program, said that ongoing cooperative research between the United States and Russia in this field is vital.

"I'd like to see a long-term bilateral project to monitor and investigate geological hazards in the North Pacific, with a real-time exchange of data," Eichelberger said in an interview at USGS headquarters in Reston, Virginia.

The geological theory of plate tectonics – that the Earth's crust is composed of 15 or so "plates" that float on molten magma – explains the powerful forces at work in this arc. Geological activity such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and mountain building occur where plate boundaries meet; the Aleutian Islands are atop the boundary where the Pacific plate is sliding under the North American plate in a process called subduction.

U.S.-Russian scientific cooperation in this North Pacific arc began only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Eichelberger said, since for military reasons the Kamchatka Peninsula was closed to foreigners during the Cold War era. The first USGS geologists visited Kamchatka in 1991.

The real breakthrough came in 1993 with the establishment of the Kamchatkan Volcanic Eruption Response Team, through which Russian and American geologists monitor volcanic activity on the Kamchatka Peninsula. Scientists at the USGS Alaska Volcano Observatory share with their Russian counterparts twice-daily feeds of satellite analysis of the Kamchatka volcanoes. Volcanic ash monitoring centers in Anchorage, Alaska; Washington; and Montreal are notified in the event of a significant eruption.

"We thought that if we're monitoring volcanoes together, we ought to extend that into research," Eichelberger said, explaining how geologists from the United States, Russia and Japan embarked on a new phase of cooperation that led to the creation in 1998 of the Japan-Kamchatka-Alaska Subduction Processes (JKASP) series of scientific workshops.

Eichelberger said the relative remoteness of Alaska, Kamchatka and the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido, combined with the logistical costs in working there, led to earth scientists generally overlooking those areas as research sites.

"All three regions have a bit of a frontier sense, far from their nation's capital," he said. JKASP was designed as a scientific forum to fill that void. Six multinational meetings have been held since then at roughly two-year intervals, with 150 or more scientists and students attending each such session. The venue rotates between Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Russia; Fairbanks, Alaska; and Sapporo, Japan.

JKASP has led to two research programs for young scientists from the United States, Russia and elsewhere.

Since 2003, the ongoing International Volcanological Field School has brought together Russian and American students for field work on the Kamchatka Peninsula and at Alaska's Mount Katmai. Eichelberger said this yearly program has led to continuing cooperation between participants from the two nations.

The second research offshoot, begun in 2005 and supported by the U.S. National Science Foundation, involves annual collaborative research work by 10 U.S. and Russian graduate students at Kamchatka's Bezymianny volcano and Mount St. Helens in the state of Washington. Bezymianny erupted in 1956 and Mount St. Helens in 1980; they share similar characteristics in their eruptions and peak collapses. This project is ending in 2011, but Eichelberger said it has produced a lot of original research.

The next JKASP workshop, to be held this year in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky August 25-30, will focus on extending geophysical monitoring and improving crisis response in the North Pacific region. This includes pinpointing earthquake hazard zones, getting real-time warnings of volcanic eruptions and tsunamis, and helping Russian and American communities in the hazard zones to be better prepared for disasters.

Another idea to be considered at the workshop will be joint oceanographic expeditions to image and sample the Aleutian volcanic arc and the Bering Sea.

It will take time to create the scientific infrastructure required to meet these objectives, Eichelberger said, since more monitoring equipment – seismometers, tsunami warning equipment, and continuous GPS instrumentation to monitor changes in volcano size that often portend eruptions – is needed in both Alaska and Kamchatka.

The USGS collaboration with Russia falls under the general framework of activities carried out through the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission, established in 2009 to improve coordination by the two nations in a variety of fields.

Eichelberger traces his interest in Russia a long way back – to childhood, in fact.

"When I was a kid, I was incredibly impressed by Sputnik," he said. "I was fascinated with Russia, and took a year of Russian language when I was at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. I moved to Alaska, which of course was Russian until 1867."

The connections Eichelberger has forged with Russia are as much personal as scientific – and do not end when he leaves the job each day. His wife, Liudamila, is a Russian volcanologist originally from south-central Siberia who

now volunteers at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington to collect Russian volcanic data for its monthly report on global volcanic activity.

Kennedy Center Shifts to Cultural Overdrive for “Maximum India”

By Howard Cincotta
Special Correspondent

Washington — Many of those planning to attend the “Maximum India” festival, a cornucopia of cultural events celebrating India at Washington’s Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts from March 1 to 20, may find they share the same mixed emotions of delight and despair.

The reason: It would be virtually impossible to experience every one of the dance, musical and theatrical performances, film showings, panel discussions, and exhibitions of a vast array of visual arts, textiles, pottery, jewelry and even cuisine. And even if you could put your life on hold and devote full time to the festival, you would come away knowing that you had barely sampled the stunning richness and diversity of art and culture from India.

The Kennedy Center will present more than 50 separate performances, events and exhibitions by 500 artists in cooperation with the Indian Council for Cultural Resources.

“This will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see many internationally acclaimed masters of the many classical dance styles on our stages,” said Kennedy Center President Michael Kaiser. “From the quiet sounds of the sitar to the raucous blaring of rock bands, we’ll present a panoply of the great music and musicians of India.”

Maximum India will be the center’s biggest program of the year. It marks the culmination of the center’s five-year exploration of the arts and cultures of the peoples along the legendary Silk Road, including Japan, China and the Middle East.

It’s also the end of a 12-year plan to feature countries from Africa, Latin America and Asia, said Alicia Adams, Kennedy Center vice president for international programming and dance.

Maximum India will offer a number of panel discussions on Indian film and literature with distinguished actors, filmmakers and writers, including one marking the 150th anniversary of the birth of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

WORLDS OF DANCE

The showstoppers at Maximum India promise to be its

remarkable lineup of dance performances. “It became impossible to exclude any of the great divas of the many styles of Indian dance,” Adams said.

Two stars of very different traditions of Indian classical dance — Madhavi Mudgal and Alarmel Valli — will perform together in *Samanvaya: A Coming Together*. Mudgal is the leading exponent of the ancient dance art of Odissi from eastern India. She has revived the Odissi form and expanded audiences through education and workshops as well as her own acclaimed performances.

Valli is one of India’s best-known dancers and choreographers in the Bharatanatyam tradition. “Now, as always, there are many gifted dancers from India,” wrote a *New York Times* critic, “but Alarmel Valli is a paragon.”

Daksha Sheth, the first woman soloist in the ancient martial dance form from eastern India called Chhau, will combine many different dance traditions in a contemporary dance-theater work called *Sarpagati: The Way of the Serpent*, which is a landmark piece in modern Indian dance.

“Over the years, I trained in several martial art forms from all over the country, and out of this I evolved my own language in dance,” she told *India Today*.

Two dance companies from outside India will perform, reflecting the cultural strength of the Indian diaspora. Ragamala, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is a leading practitioner of Bharatanatyam dance. From Washington, the Dakshina/Daniel Phoenix Singh Dance Company reflects the different identities of young South Asians by combining traditional forms with modern dance.

“We did a lot of research and attended many performances to make the choices that would give audiences an overview of the culture,” said the Kennedy Center’s Adams.

THEATER AND MUSIC

Washington’s National Symphony Orchestra will give three performances as part of Maximum India. One is a composition written especially for the festival by composer and tabla player Zahir Hussain. He will perform on tabla with the orchestra under conductor Christoph Eschenbach in music that combines Hindu ragas, Sufi kalam and Christian church music.

The woman known as “the Ghazal Queen,” Vatsala Mehra, will perform, as will “the Raga Pianist,” Utsav Lal.

The Kennedy Center’s smaller Terrace Theater will host contemporary rock, jazz and other music that blends different genres. Among the performers: guitar, violin,

bass and vocals by Emergence from Tamil-Nadu; tabla player Suphala; jazz from Indo-Pak Coalition; drummer and composer Sunny Jain; and music producers D.J. Rekha and Panjabi MC.

A musical and theatrical highlight will be *The Manganiyar Seduction* by a Muslim Sufi sect from the Rajasthan desert in northwest India, under the Indian director Roysten Abel. The 43 musicians are seated in 36 stacked red cubicles that become illuminated individually and collectively as the music unfolds in an unusual multimedia experience.

“The lyrics are all Sufi couplets, and it’s all going out to the universe or God,” Abel said in an interview on National Public Radio. “The performance is something of a hybrid – not exactly a concert, not exactly a theater piece, but something designed to illuminate and make the audience feel the music of the Manganiyars.”

FILM, LITERATURE, EXHIBITS

Along with film showings, well-known Indian actors and filmmakers from Bollywood and elsewhere will appear for panel discussions on the Indian film industry and the portrayal of women in film. They will include actors Nandita Das, Shabana Azmi, Sharmila Tagore; film directors Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Ketan Mehta; and film scholar Dilip Basu.

Indian film star Naseeruddin Shah and his Motley Theatre Group will perform three theater pieces based on the short stories of writer Ismat Khanum Chughtai.

Another panel will explore the relationship between Mohandas Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore through their letters and articles. The tension between literature and politics will bring together three very different writers: novelist Salman Rushdie, commentator and novelist Nayantara Sahgal and British-born journalist and writer William Dalrymple.

Exhibitions of contemporary art will abound throughout the Kennedy Center’s halls and galleries, featuring displays of the color and variety of the Indian sari, the pankha or hand fan, and magnificent gems and jewelry from Jaipur’s Gem Palace.

Announcing the Maximum India festival in New Delhi, U.S. Ambassador to India Timothy Roemer said, “These people-to-people ties are what bind our two countries together.”

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