

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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American News & Views Moving to Weekly

Dear Sir/Madam,

Starting this week, the U.S. Embassy will begin publishing *American News & Views* once a week, on Fridays. This weekly publication will include a compilation of the most interesting and useful articles from the Department of State.

The Embassy will also cease delivering paper copies of *American News & Views*, but will continue to post the newsletter to the Embassy Web site (<http://burma.usembassy.gov>) and e-mail it to those on our mailing list. To be clear, today's *American News & Views* will be the last paper copy that you receive.

If you would like to sign up to receive *American News & Views* by email, please send an e-mail to HteinW@state.gov.

Thank you.

President Obama Responds to Burmese Progress on Democratic Reform

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says his decision to send Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to Burma is in response to a series of human rights and political reforms and his own consultation with Burmese opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

“We want to seize what could be an historic opportunity for progress, and make it clear that if Burma continues to travel down the road of democratic reform, it can forge a new relationship with the United States of America,” Obama said November 18 in Bali, Indonesia, where he is attending the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations meetings and the East Asia Summit.

The United States has maintained sanctions against Burma and limited its contact with government officials for decades in response to the country’s abuses against political opponents, ethnic minorities, democratic reformers and others. Clinton will be visiting the country December 1 to meet with government and opposition leaders, including Suu Kyi, in response to recent “flickers of progress,” Obama said. Clinton will be the first American secretary of state to travel to Burma in more than half a century.

“President Thein Sein and the Burmese Parliament have taken important steps on the path toward reform. A dialogue between the government and Aung San Suu Kyi has begun. The government has released some political prisoners. Media restrictions have been relaxed. And legislation has been approved that could open the political environment,” Obama said.

“Taken together, these are the most important steps toward reform in Burma that we’ve seen in years,” he said.

The president praised the “quiet dignity and extraordinary potential” of the Burmese people, and said that if their government “seizes this moment, then reconciliation can prevail, and millions of people may get the chance to live with a greater measure of freedom, prosperity and dignity.”

Before announcing Clinton’s visit, Obama spoke with Suu Kyi in a 20-minute phone call to consult with her on developments in Burma and confirm her support for the Clinton visit.

According to a senior Obama administration official who asked not to be identified, Suu Kyi “was quite supportive and enthusiastic about the need to try to reinforce the

positive steps that have been taken and to create momentum for reform.”

The president long has admired Suu Kyi, and wants the steps the United States is taking not only to be responsive to what the Burmese government is doing, but also responsive to the views of Burmese democracy activists, a U.S. official told reporters in a briefing in Bali November 18.

Suu Kyi and others in Burmese civil society “believe that the moment is now,” one official said, and that Burma’s government is making “a sincere effort.”

“We think that the winds of change are blowing inside the country — but it’s not far enough yet,” a U.S. official said in the briefing. “And we believe that the best way to help entrench those changes and see them go further is by an active engagement. And that’s why the president decided to send Secretary Clinton to Burma.”

“We wouldn’t be taking this step if they had just made verbal pledges. This is in response to actual laws being passed through the Parliament, prisoners being released, changes ... taking place within the country,” the official said.

In her conversation with Obama, Suu Kyi encouraged him to “make clear to Burma’s leaders that the U.S. will be willing to work with them if they are, in fact, demonstrating that they are willing to work with the world and with her,” the official said.

President Obama Concludes Nine-Day Journey in Asia-Pacific Region

By Merle Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — A significant goal of President Obama’s nine-day trip from Hawaii to Australia and then to Indonesia was to reinforce America’s deepening commitment to the Asia-Pacific region and its emerging institutions.

Obama opened the trip with the 21-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Leaders’ Meeting in Honolulu, which was hosted by the United States for the first time in 18 years. The president then made a stop in Australia for consultations in Canberra and Darwin with Australian leaders and to address the Australian Parliament before concluding the trip in Bali, Indonesia, to attend the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ (ASEAN) Summit and the East Asia Summit (EAS). It marked the first time a U.S. president has attended the East Asia Summit.

The president also held numerous individual meetings with national leaders on the sidelines of the larger

conferences.

“The president has made clear that full and active U.S. engagement in the region’s multilateral architecture helps to reinforce the system of rules, responsibilities, and norms that underlie regional peace, stability and prosperity,” the White House said in an East Asia Summit fact sheet summarizing why the United States is seeking strengthened engagement.

National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon told reporters during a briefing in Bali November 19 that the trip was “the implementation of a substantial and important reorientation in American global strategy.”

“Alliances are an essential strategic asset for the United States around the world,” Donilon told reporters. “Over the last two weeks, the president has met face-to-face with each of our Asia treaty allies, and engaged in really the continuing work to strengthen those alliances.”

No other nation in the world has the alliance system that the United States has developed, and it is regarded as a strategic asset, Donilon said.

A second goal of this trip, he said, was for the president to engage intensively with the emerging power centers in the region – such as China, India and Indonesia – which is why it was crucial for the president to hold individual talks with leaders at every opportunity throughout the trip.

Another aspect of the U.S. strategy in the Pacific Rim is to participate actively in regional multilateral institutions, such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, Donilon said. The decision to participate in the East Asia Summit was made after considerable debate within the White House, and was based on the belief that by engaging, the United States could help shape the agenda and help transform the EAS into the premier institution in Asia for addressing diplomatic security and other issues, he added.

Donilon said trade and the economy also were discussed. The United States announced a series of commercial transactions in Indonesia; worked on the U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement and World Trade Organization accession for Russia; participated in APEC trade and economic talks; discussed the work being done for a free-trade based Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); and joined in the announcement that a number of countries want to join the TPP, he added.

MARITIME SECURITY

During a November 19 briefing aboard Air Force One

returning to Washington, a senior administration official said the discussions during the East Asia Summit focused on disaster relief and some of the initiatives that have been taken by member countries, including a U.S. proposal for a disaster relief mechanism that would allow for quick response through pre-approved access agreements in advance of emergencies. Such a plan would hasten relief efforts and bring supplies and relief teams faster to enhance recovery and rescue. The ASEAN leaders also discussed economic integration, a recurring theme in all of the leaders’ meetings, in addition to free trade, education assistance programs and disaster relief, the official said.

The senior White House official said that “the bulk of the discussions were a very robust conversation on maritime security and the South China Sea.” A number of nations in the immediate region have made claims on all or part of the South China Sea, which may hold as-yet-untapped rich deposits of oil and natural gas. The official said at least 16 of the 18 leaders attending the EAS meeting addressed maritime security in varying levels.

The Asia-Pacific region is home to some of the world’s busiest ports and most critical lines of commerce and communication, the White House fact sheet said. “Recent decades of broad regional economic success have been underpinned by a shared commitment to freedom of navigation and international law,” the White House said.

The president explained the principles-based U.S. approach to maritime security, including freedom of navigation and overflight by commercial airplanes, the lawful uses of the sea lanes and a collaborative diplomatic process to address disputes, the fact sheet said.

White House Fact Sheet: ASEAN-United States Leaders Meeting

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
November, 20, 2011

FACT SHEET: ASEAN-UNITED STATES LEADERS MEETING

On November 18, 2011, President Obama met with the leaders of the 10 member states of the Association of Southeast Asia Nations to review our cooperation on building greater economic, security, and people-to-people ties with an important region and a key Asian multilateral organization. With a population of approximately 580 million and a combined GDP of \$1.5 trillion, ASEAN is the United States’ fourth largest export market, includes two treaty allies, one of our closest security partners, and several emerging regional powers, and sits astride some of the world’s most important trading routes and sea lines

of communication.

Leaders adopted the Five-year ASEAN-United States Plan of Action, a roadmap for expanding our strategic cooperation. The Plan of Action includes collaborative projects in three main areas—political and security, economic and trade, and socio-cultural cooperation.

Going forward, the United States will work with ASEAN through the US-ASEAN Trade and Investment Framework Work Plan to build on existing work on trade facilitation and ongoing dialogues on trade and environment and trade finance by introducing new initiatives on digital connectivity and trade and investment in healthcare services, agribusiness, and consumer goods.

The United States and Brunei announced the United States Partnership with ASEAN on English Language Education. This ambitious, five-year, \$25 million initiative, supported by the governments of Brunei and Singapore with the East-West Center in Hawaii as an implementing coordinator, reflects a commitment to help unify the diverse members of ASEAN, improve English language capacity, and advance educational and teaching opportunities in the region.

The United States is supporting the launch of the ASEAN youth volunteers program and sponsorship a visit by the Volunteers and the ASEAN Commission on Women and Children the U.S. next April to connect with U.S. civil society groups on best practices.

The United States, under President Obama's global Feed the Future initiative and through the ASEAN Secretariat, will support a program to promote the role of the private sector and public-private dialogue on food security policies and solutions.

The United States announced plans to launch an initiative enabling US Trade and Development Agency to bring the best of U.S. business to ASEAN in a first, major commercial outreach to discuss upcoming connectivity infrastructure projects and the role for U.S. business.

The United States proposed the creation a Southeast Asia Maritime Partnership (SAMP), which will provide a multi-agency approach to cooperation and capacity building on maritime awareness, management and security.

The United States and ASEAN will work together to launch the "ASEAN Single Window" pilot program, a trade facilitation project to expedite cargo clearance. When fully operational, this will be the world's first regional integrated cargo-clearance system.

ASEAN leaders, supported by the United States as an Asian Development Bank (ADB) member, will create an ASEAN Infrastructure Fund. ASEAN governments, supported by ADB members, will contribute to the fund to help underwrite infrastructure projects in the region. The initial fund of \$600 million will support infrastructure projects aimed at creating an integrated ASEAN community, and will provide expanded opportunities for U.S. businesses to participate in ASEAN infrastructure projects in the energy, transportations, and information and communications technology sectors.

President Obama announced the three U.S. members of the U.S.-ASEAN Eminent Persons Group: Stapleton Roy, Charlene Barshefsky, and Muhtar Kent, fulfilling a commitment he made with ASEAN leaders in 2009. The group will deliver recommendations to the Leaders ahead of the next ASEAN-US Leaders Meeting.

Leaders welcomed the successful conclusion of negotiations to enable the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France and China to accede to the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty (SEANWFZ) protocol, and agreed to take the necessary steps to enable the signing of the protocol and its entry into force by these states at the earliest opportunity.

The ten ASEAN Leaders are Sultan Hassanal of Brunei, President Thein Sein of Burma (Myanmar), Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia, President Yudhoyono of Indonesia, Prime Minister Thongsing of Laos, Prime Minister Najib of Malaysia, President Aquino of the Philippines, Prime Minister Lee of Singapore, Prime Minister Yingluck of Thailand, and Prime Minister Dung of Vietnam, as well as ASEAN Secretary General Surin.

Secretary Clinton Calls for Greater Economic Integration in Asia-Pacific

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told business executives in Bali, Indonesia, November 18 that the way to achieve the broadest, most inclusive and sustainable growth for the Asia-Pacific region is by insisting on economic cooperation that is open, free and fair.

The region has the world's fastest-growing economies, with gross domestic product growth — the broadest measure of a nation's total output of goods and services — at an average of 6.5 percent a year despite the recent global slowdown, Clinton said. "With natural resources, untapped markets, a massive consumer base and unlimited human potential, we expect that to continue to grow," Clinton said in an address to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Business and Investment Summit, which is meeting alongside the

annual ASEAN summit, which President Obama is attending.

“It is especially important that we work toward the integration of the Asia-Pacific region because the potential here matters more than ever, first and foremost to the people who live here, but indeed to those living across the globe,” Clinton said.

But there is still more to accomplish before trade between the United States and Southeast Asia reaches its full potential, she said. Trade between the United States and Southeast Asia has tripled over the past 20 years, but accounts for just 6 percent of the United States’ global trade.

“It means taking on rules that prevent foreign investors from competing with local businesses to produce better goods and services,” Clinton said. “It means lowering trade barriers that stop the flow of ideas, information, products and capital across borders.

“It means letting outside investors compete under the same rules as the inside players,” she added.

Clinton said, “The absence of fairness undermines economic growth.”

Clinton outlined four ways in which the United States wants to work with Southeast Asian nations and businesses: first, lowering trade barriers; second, strengthening the investment climate; third, pursuing commercial diplomacy that advocates for businesses; and fourth, supporting entrepreneurs.

Clinton said that creating a single trading community across the Pacific into the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with developed and developing economies will create more economic growth and better growth.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a regional trade negotiation currently composed of nine countries – the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Chile and Peru – that have been working on broad outlines for a major trading agreement. Japan has expressed interest in joining the regional trade pact.

Lowering trade barriers, though, is only part of the effort that will be needed, Clinton said. The United States shares the ASEAN belief that strengthening roads, rails, ports, power stations and other infrastructure will be necessary for the efficient flow of goods and services, which forms the backbone of an efficient trading economy.

USAID and Partners Seek New Ways to Overcome Illiteracy

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington – An international partnership of government and nonprofit organizations launched a \$20 million campaign November 18 to find new ways to educate the almost 800 million people in the world who are illiterate, unable to write or read a simple sentence in any language. An inability to read inhibits a person’s capability to navigate the modern world, and in large numbers, restrains the development of an entire nation.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), its Australian counterpart AusAid and the charity World Vision announced the intent of their partnership at an event in Washington. USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah said the campaign, All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development, is seeking new education strategies “from those of you that have entrepreneurial new ideas, interesting new technologies that can be brought to the task and a vision for how 100 million children around the world improve their reading outcomes.”

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan signed up his department for the campaign in the hope that it will produce new ideas on helping “every single child” in the world learn to read. Duncan expressed the goal “that enhancing the education of all people – both here in the United States and across the globe – is the path to solving our world’s economic, social and health challenges.”

Analysis of development efforts has shown that education has a “multiplier effect,” bringing greater consequential benefits, such as better health, growing economies and reduced poverty. “Every single year that a child spends in school increases his or her future productivity by 10 to 30 percent,” Duncan said.

The All Children Reading campaign will solicit proposals from all over the world that describe new paths to learning or new teaching techniques that might be applied in classrooms anywhere. The U.S. Department of Education has launched a similarly intended program known as Digital Promise, in which educators, researchers and technology companies are working to identify breakthrough technologies to enhance the educational experience for youngsters and foster enthusiasm for learning.

Shah said the international development community and governments in sub-Saharan Africa have made great progress in getting children enrolled in school over the last 10-12 years, with enrollment swelling by 37 million. Unfortunately, follow-up surveys indicate that many

children are not learning when they get there.

All Children Reading also is intended to develop new ways of using mobile telephone and messaging technologies as educational tools, given the rapid adoption of these technologies in the developing world.

This literacy initiative was announced just days after President Obama and Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard discussed greater cooperation between the countries on development issues. USAID and AusAID will contribute to other ongoing efforts to close the mobile phone gender gap and accelerate women's empowerment and leadership opportunities. The partnership will improve women's access to life-enhancing services including financial inclusion, education and health care via mobile phones, according to a November 16 statement from the White House.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)