

## Polls result not to affect India-US ties: Obama

'Midcourse corrections' to come at home

AP, PTI, Mumbai/new Delhi

Given the "strong bipartisan" support for India in the US, President Barack Obama yesterday said the results of the Congressional polls in which his Democrats got a drubbing was not going to affect ties with this country.

Noting that his country has enormous "fondness" for India, Obama said the United States does not just see India as a rising power, saying "we believe India is already risen." Showing praise on India's dynamic economy and its strategic role in Asia and beyond, Obama said there is a strong bipartisan belief in the US that this country is going to be a critical partner for it in the 21st century.

On the second of the three days he is spending in India, Obama arrived in New Delhi on Sunday afternoon in the company of his wife, Michelle. Among his airport greeters were Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who apparently broke the normally rigid rules of protocol by making the trip to personally welcome Obama to the Indian capital.

Obama made these remarks when asked by a student at an interaction at St Xavier's college how the changes he hopes to make in the wake of the drubbing by Democrats in the US Congressional elections would affect India.

The president in his response had also spoken of the "course corrections" required in his presidency. Obama said the partnership between India and the US has "limitless potential" to improve the lives of people of the two countries.

"Indo-US relations will be indispensable in shaping the 21st century."

The US has enormous fondness for India.

India is going to be a critical partner for the US in 21st century," he said. "There is a strong bipartisan belief in the US that India is going to be a critical partner."

It has been true always whether it is George W. Bush presidency or Bill Clinton's, Democrats or Republicans. I don't think that fundamental belief is not going to be altered anyway," he said.

"US does not just see India as a rising power.



US President Barack Obama (2L) shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (C) as he and his wife Michelle (R) arrive at Air Force Station in New Delhi yesterday.

stage," he added.

He acknowledged that he must make some "midcourse corrections" if he is to win over a frustrated electorate and work with resurgent Republicans.

He told one that the midterm elections back home reflected the "right, obligation and duty" of the voters to express their unhappiness with the state of US affairs by voting out many incumbents, the majority of whom are Democrats like Obama.

The president himself wasn't on the ballot last week, but his party took a beating. Republicans won control of the House, eroded the Democratic majority in the Senate, made huge gains at the state level and broadly changed the political landscape as Obama begins looking ahead to his own re-election campaign in 2012.

Obama said he will not change his determination to move America forward by investing in education, infrastructure and clean energy despite mounting pressure in Washington to cut spending. But he said, without elaborating, that the election "requires me to make some midcourse corrections and adjustments."

How those will play out over the next several months, Obama said, will depend on his talks with Republicans. His comments seemed to reflect a deeper acknowledgment of the need for change by the White House, but as he did at a news conference the day after the election, Obama stayed purposely vague on how he would reposition his agenda.

The town hall with students, now a staple of Obama's foreign travel, was part of his outreach to this democracy of more than 1 billion people. India is an emerging power in Asia and an increasingly important partner to the US on trade and security, in part because its rise offers a measure of balance to the growing strength of China.

The president is in the midst of his lengthiest trip abroad as president, a 10-day journey across India, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan. He began Sunday by showing a softer side, chatting with students at another school and even dancing with them, albeit reluctantly, after his wife had eagerly done the same.

India is already risen, we wish India's emergence as good for the US and the world," Obama said against the backdrop of oft-repeated assertions by US officials that India is a rising power.

"Its(India)economy has risen at a breathtaking rate. We look forward to a greater role for India at the world



US President Barack Obama (L) and First Lady Michelle Obama dance during a cultural event at The Holy Name High School in Mumbai yesterday.

### US to back India's membership of NSG

PTI, New Delhi

The United States could back India's membership of the 45-member Nuclear Suppliers Group or NSG.

This membership makes it easier for India to get dual-use technology from member countries though it's subject to rules of individual nations. It's also means India has a say in framing export control rules.

In a statement, Mike Froman, the Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economic Affairs says, "...the United States will support India's full membership in the four multi-lateral export control regimes. These are the Nuclear Suppliers Group; what's called the MTCR regime -- the Missile Technology Control Regime; the Australian Group; and the Wassenaar Arrangement."

These are groups of multi-lateral, dual use export control clubs. The Australia Group deals with chemical and biological weapons, and Wassenaar deals with conventional weapons and dual use technology in it.

"Now, this membership will come in a phased manner. And we will consult with our regime members to encourage the evolution of a membership criteria of these regimes consistent with maintaining their core principles.

### Separatist calls for Obama to focus on Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

A top separatist in Indian Kashmir urged the United States yesterday to intervene in the disputed region, saying Washington could eliminate its "trust-deficit" in the Muslim world.

Syed Ali Geelani said in a statement directed at President Barack Obama, who is visiting India: "Resolution of the (Kashmir) problem with American assistance will go a long way in eradicating the trust deficit between the US and the Muslim world."

Congratulating Obama on his three-day visit to India, the hardline separatist said "we hope and expect you to use all your influence to restore the right of self-determination to the people of the state."

Kashmir is divided between nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan, but both countries claim it in full. It has sparked two of three wars between the neighbours since the division of the subcontinent in 1947.

Decades-old UN resolutions call for a referendum in Kashmir to determine the status of the territory, but New Delhi views them as obsolete and is staunchly opposed to any outside intervention in the conflict.

Obama provoked an angry response in India before he took office by suggesting that the United States could mediate in Kashmir.

The statement by Geelani came on the second day of a three-day strike called by separatists to draw the attention of Obama.

The region has been hit by rolling protests since June 11, when a 17-year-old student was killed by a police tear gas shell, leading to an almost total economic shutdown and severe hardship for local people.

Since then, security forces have been accused of killing a total of 111 people, mostly teenagers and students.

Peace in South Asia cannot be achieved "without a resolution of core issue of Kashmir," Geelani said.

Obama on Sunday urged India and Pakistan to work together to resolve their differences, while pushing Islamabad to do more to tackle extremism, which fuels attacks on India.

### Speaker urges Berlusconi to resign

AFP, Perugia

Italy's speaker of parliament yesterday threatened to pull his supporters out of the government if Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi did not resign, setting up a critical political standoff.

"He should... take the decision to hand in his resignation," Gianfranco Fini said in a scathing attack on his former ally Berlusconi at a conference of his new political movement in the city of Perugia in central Italy.

Fini, who rebelled against Berlusconi earlier this year, said the resignation should bring a new political chapter in which "the nature of the coalition and the composition of the government are re-discussed."

"We can't go on like this," he added.

Fini, a former foreign minister, has long been seen as a powerful political player. But he has often been sidelined by Berlusconi ever since the flamboyant media tycoon burst onto Italy's political scene in the early 1990s.

Fini announced in July that he and his supporters would break away from the ruling People of Freedom party although he made it clear that he would continue to support the government in parliament based on certain conditions.

### 7,000MW more power

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Apart from the 30 power plants, Hasina said the government plans to set up 10 more power plants and the work orders for these plants will be given soon.

She also mentioned that 3,300MW of electricity will be generated from the 30 power plants while 4,000MW will be generated from the 10 new big power plants.

Hasina was critical of the previous BNP-Jamaat government for not implementing the project undertaken by the Awami League government during its previous tenure to set up a power plant at Daudkandi.

She said when the Awami League government left in 2001 the power generation was 4,300MW but when the present government took over again in 2008, it found only 3,100MW of power.

"I know the countrymen are facing crisis of electricity and the government is relentlessly working to generate more electricity to remove the public sufferings," she said.

Earlier, the PM laid the foundation stone for 50MW Daudkandi peaking power plant in Titas upazila, Comilla. The project, being implemented at a cost of nearly Tk 575 crore, is expected to be ready for power generation by September next year.

Addressing the public meeting, the PM also assured the people of trying the war criminals and bringing the

killers of the four national leaders to book.

The government is strongly determined to make every family self-reliant through ensuring their accommodation, health facilities and education, she said.

Referring to government-sponsored Ashrayan Project, Hasina said every destitute can take financial help from the government to build their own homes.

"Those who have land, but are not capable of building a house on it will be given financial help from the government," she said.

NGOs can take loans from the government's housing fund at 1 percent service charge and build homes for the destitute, she added.

The PM said a committee is working to introduce full free education up to graduate level to facilitate destitute children with all facilities of higher education.

"We have also decided to build schools in every area of the country. All the schools will gradually be given computers with internet facilities," she said.

District Awami League President Abdul Awal Sarkar presided over the meeting while PM's Energy Adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources M Enamul Haque, lawmaker Subid Ali Bhuiyan and Whip Mujibul Haque, among others, addressed the meeting.

### Govt doing cost-benefit analysis

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This was stated by Finance Minister AMA Muhith and prime minister's economic affairs adviser Mashiur Rahman at a press conference following a review meeting on the Agreed Action Plan of Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) yesterday.

They said China and Myanmar will also be included in the regional cooperation. The donors have committed to provide additional assistance for such cooperation apart from their normal assistance.

In February, the 25-point action plan was agreed upon at the BDF meeting. An interim review of progress of the action plans was made at yesterday's meeting held at the NEC auditorium in the capital.

Government officials, representatives of the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UK's Department For International Development and representatives of other multilateral and bilateral development partners were present at the meeting.

BDF is a forum of Bangladesh government and its development partners, which discusses effective use of foreign assistance.

At the press conference, Muhith and Mashiur dwelt

on the government plan on regional cooperation and donors' interest in it.

In reply to a question, the finance minister said many studies have been carried out on the cost-benefit of giving transit and transshipment. The government has been working on it since February.

"We will take a decision in this regard after analysing it (cost-benefit) in the next two months," he said.

Mashiur said Bangladesh will get fees for use of its services by different countries under regional cooperation, and it will be benefited. Different countries have allowed transit facilities to others, and the government is collecting information regarding this.

After analysing how much investment will come to the country and the amount of revenue it will generate, the government will take a decision about the fees to be charged for transit and transshipment, said the PM's adviser.

The government will take the decision only if a win-win situation is created for all, he added.

The WB and ADB are already providing assistance for different projects for regional cooperation. Other development partners have

also assured assistance in this regard, Mashiur said.

The development partners have a separate fund for regional cooperation.

Muhith said that at the review meeting, the development partners emphasised civil service reforms, speedy implementation of annual development programme, result-based framework, strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission and increasing investment in energy and transport sectors.

And they told the donors that the government will try to establish result-based framework in at least 10-15 sectors. Besides, a road map for civil service reforms will be prepared, he said.

D F I D Country Representative and the local consultative group co-chair Chris Austin said they have focused on the Agreed Action points including civil service reforms, completion of the financial management and implementation of the climate change resilience fund and country investment plan on food security.

Planning Minister AK Khanaker also spoke at the press conference.

### Israel to pull out from Lebanon border village

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel is planning to withdraw its troops from part of a disputed village on the Lebanese border and hand over control to a UN peacekeeping force, an official said yesterday.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the unnamed official confirmed that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was to inform UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon about the planned move when the two meet in New York on Monday.

Plans to withdraw from the northern sector of Ghajar village have been discussed with senior officials from the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which is deployed along the border with Israel to keep the peace.

The village, which has around 2,200 residents, lies on the borders of Lebanon, Syria and the Golan Heights which Israel seized from Syria in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed in 1981.

Netanyahu will present the Ghajar proposal to his political-security cabinet when he returns to Israel after a five-day trip to the United States, the official said.

UNIFIL confirmed it has been pressing Israel to withdraw from northern Ghajar in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which ended a 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon's Shia movement Hezbollah.

"This has been a longstanding issue," UNIFIL's director of political and civil affairs Milos Strugar told AFP. The United Nations had been "actively engaged" with both parties to broker a pullout of Israeli troops.

"In our effort to advance the process of withdrawal, UNIFIL has recently suggested some ideas and modalities for consideration by the parties," he said, without giving details.

Northern Ghajar is in Lebanon and the rest lies in the Golan Heights, but Israel took over the Lebanese half during the 2006 war.

The villagers of southern Ghajar were Syrian nationals when Israel occupied the region but they took Israeli nationality after the Golan annexation, a move not recognised by the international community.