

Obama backs India on permanent UNSC seat

BBC ONLINE
US President Barack Obama has backed India's ambition for permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

In an address to India's parliament at the end of a three-day visit, Obama lavishly praised India's development.

His remarks will delight India, which has been lobbying for a seat at the UN's top table for years. Analysts say it does not mean India will get a permanent seat immediately; the unspecified UN reforms Obama mentioned could take years.

The US leader also said the Washington-Delhi relationship would be one of this century's defining partnerships.

The loudest applause came when Obama told dignitaries: "As two global leaders, the United States and India can partner for global security - especially as India serves on the Security Council over the next two years."

"Indeed the just and sustainable international order that America seeks includes a United Nations that is efficient, effective, credible and legitimate."

"And that is why I can say today, in the years ahead, I look forward to a reformed United Nations Security Council that includes India as a permanent member."

There are currently five permanent members of the Security Council: the US, China, France, the UK and Russia.

In another important gesture to India, Obama spoke about the threat of militancy from its regional rival, Pakistan.

Pakistan said it hoped the United States would not be swayed by "power politics" in its support for a permanent seat for India in a reformed United Nations Security Council.

"Pakistan believes that US endorsement of India's bid for its permanent seat in the Security Council adds to the complexity of the process of reforms of the Council," the foreign ministry spokesman Abdul Basit said in a statement.

Obama said: "We will continue to insist to Pakistan's leaders that terrorist safe havens within their borders are unacceptable, and that the terrorists behind the Mumbai attacks be brought to justice."

At the weekend, Obama visited a memorial to victims of the 2008 attacks in Mumbai (Bombay).

In his speech, Obama also paid tribute to independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, saying: "I am mindful that I might not be standing before you today, as president of the United States, had it not been for Gandhi."

Earlier, Obama paid tribute to India as a world power, saying both countries would work together to promote stability and prosperity.

"As the world's two largest democracies, as large and growing free market economies, as diverse, multi-ethnic societies with strong traditions of pluralism and tolerance, we have not only an opportunity, but also a responsibility to lead."



US President Barack Obama (R) holds a courtesy meeting with Congress President Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi yesterday. President Obama heaped praise on his host India as he described India as an "indispensable" cornerstone of US policy in Asia. PHOTO: AFP

Michelle dances her way into Indian hearts

AFP, New Delhi

US First Lady Michelle Obama is an undisputed hit in India after winning hearts with a Bollywood boogie and displaying a common touch critics say her husband sometimes lacks.

The Times of India hailed her as a "dancing queen" after she took to the floor twice during her visit to Mumbai, shaking a leg to Bollywood hits on Saturday and joining in a local folk dance with school-children on Sunday.

Photographs of the 46-year-old wearing a range of outfits from a sober grey tunic to a bright turquoise dress have been splashed in Indian newspapers, with most noting her style approvingly.

Videos of the First Lady dancing have been getting constant play on Indian news channels, with leading station NDTV describing it as "the defining image of the Obamas' maiden visit to India".

India Today magazine drew attention to her "emotional appeal" with a headline saying, "Michelle steals Barack's thunder".

"Obama appeals to the head, Michelle touches the heart, despite her formidable intelligence," the magazine noted, praising her "inordinate warmth" and calling the couple "a perfect team at work".

Speaking to students at Mumbai's St Xavier's College on Sunday, the First Lady peppered her speech with personal stories of her working-class childhood in Chicago and encouraged her audience to "keep dreaming big, gigantic dreams".

Indian author and commentator Shobha De described the visit as "a charm offensive".

"She succeeded spectacularly... What came across in her interaction with average Indians was her ability to think on her feet and respond intuitively," De told AFP.

US president reveals results of Mumbai plotter probe

AFP, New Delhi

President Barack Obama yesterday shared with India results of a probe into why US intelligence did not act on warnings about an American man who emerged as a key figure in the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

Senior officials said Obama brought up the case of David Coleman Headley in talks with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, adding that some details of the probe by the Director for National Intelligence (DNI) would be released publicly soon.

According to a report in the Washington Post, the probe shows US officials had information building up on Headley's links with Islamic militants, over seven years, but did not question him or put him on any watch list.

The president shared some of the results of that review with Prime Minister

Singh. Ben Rhodes, a deputy national security advisor, told reporters after the two leaders met in New Delhi.

"What I think we found is the United States had pieces of information that came in about David Headley."

"They were not the kinds of information we were able to connect, for instance, to the plotting in Mumbai," he said.

Rhodes said the US government had provided general information about the attacks to India before the Mumbai strikes, but that the data was not specific.

Headley, the son of a former Pakistani diplomat and a white American woman, is being held in the United States.

He has confessed to helping plan the Mumbai attacks and in exchange for pleading guilty US prosecutors agreed he would not face extradition to India or the death penalty.

Specifically, he admitted to scouting the

hotels and other sites that were targeted in the eventual assault by 10 Islamist militants, which killed 166 people.

The Mumbai attacks have been a theme of Obama's current trip to India.

He stayed in the Taj Mahal Palace hotel in Mumbai, which became the focus of the assault, and met survivors and victims' relatives.

The Post and ProPublica, an investigative journalism group, revealed that one of Headley's wives had warned FBI agents in August 2005 that her husband had undergone intensive training with Lashkar-e-Taiba -- the radical extremist group blamed for the Mumbai attacks.

Despite warnings about his activities, Headley continued to move freely, travelling to Pakistan, India, Dubai and Europe in 2006, gathering information and material that made the Mumbai attacks possible.

Obama recites from Tagore, recalls Gandhi

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

US President Barack Obama yesterday quoted Rabindranath Tagore's poem "chitto jetha bhoy shunno, uchcho jetha shir" (where the mind is without fear and the head is held high) as he eulogised India's contribution to world civilisations.

Obama's reference to Tagore came during his address to Indian Parliament when he also recalled the message of Swami Vivekananda delivered in 1893 at the Parliament of World Religions in the American President's hometown Chicago.

"It's the richness of faiths celebrated by a visitor to my hometown of Chicago more than a century ago -- the renowned Swami Vivekananda," he said when he dwelt on the "very idea of India" -- "its embrace of all colours, castes and creeds".

But most of all, his speech was dotted with references of Mahatma Gandhi, India's Father of the Nation whom he had hailed two days ago as "a hero not just to India but to the world."

"In the life of Gandhiji and in his simple and

profound lesson to be the change we seek in the world. And just as he summoned Indians to seek their destiny, he influenced champions of equality in my own country, including a young Martin Luther King.

"After making his pilgrimage to India a half century ago, Dr King called Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance 'the only logical and moral approach' in the struggle for justice and progress," the 49-year-old US President said.

He said he felt honoured and humbled to visit the residence where Gandhi and King had stayed -- Mani Bhavan in Mumbai -- and the memorial of the father of Indian nation Mahatma Gandhi at Raj Ghat in Delhi.

Obama also mentioned Kolkata in his speech. "We believe that no matter where you live -- whether a village in Punjab or the by lanes of Chandni Chowk... an old section of Kolkata or a new high-rise in Bangalore -- every person deserves the same chance to live in security and dignity, to get an education, to find work, and to give their children a better future."



US President Barack Obama (R) and First Lady Michelle Obama (L) participate in wreath laying ceremony at Raj Ghat in New Delhi on November 7 on the final leg of his three-day trip, after paying homage to victims of terror in Mumbai, and seeking job-creating dividends for the struggling US economy in India's commercial hub. PHOTO: AFP

India rejected peace talks: Pakistan

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan's president has accused India of rejecting what he termed peace overtures made earlier this year, a sign of how far apart the neighbouring countries remain two years after relations crumbled in the wake of the Mumbai terror attacks.

Asif Ali Zardari made the comments late Sunday just hours after President Barack Obama urged the two nations to resolve their differences through dialogue. Obama was speaking to students in Mumbai, where he was on the second day of a four-day visit to India.

Better ties between India and Pakistan would help Washington in the war in Afghanistan because it would allow Islamabad to shift troops to the western border to fight militants there.

Moreover, Pakistan's alleged support for the Taliban in Afghanistan is motivated partly by its fear of Indian influence there.

List of accords signed during Obama's trip

AFP, New Delhi

The United States and India yesterday signed six agreements besides a plethora of business deals inked separately during US President Barack Obama's trip to India.

Here is a list of the main government-to-government agreements:

- India-US agreement to set up a joint Clean Energy Research and Development Centre. It will be backed by 50 million dollars by both sides over five years and work to complete joint research in solar, biofuels and energy efficiency.

- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for a Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership. US will cooperate in India's plans for a nuclear centre, to promote nuclear security and address threats of nuclear terrorism.

- MOU to establish an India-US Energy Cooperation Programme. It will mobilise private sector expertise and resources to address clean energy-related issues in India and the US.

- Agreement on technical cooperation to study India's annual monsoon rains. Cooperation on weather forecasting for India's crucial annual monsoon.

- MOU between India and the US on shale gas resources which will see US technology used to assess shale gas resources in India.

- MOU on establishing and operating a Global Disease Detection Centre in India, which will set up a laboratory in New Delhi designed to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

US president criticises India's silence on Myanmar

AFP, New Delhi

US President Barack Obama criticised India yesterday for failing to condemn rights abuses in Myanmar, saying democracies with global aspirations could not ignore "gross violations" in other countries.

"When peaceful democratic movements are suppressed, as they have been in Burma (Myanmar), then the democracies of the world cannot remain silent," Obama said in an address to the Indian parliament.

"Faced with such gross violations of human rights, it is the responsibility of the international community, especially leaders like the United States and India, to condemn it," he said.

"If I can be frank, in international for a, India has often shied away from these issues," he added.

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