

Obama, Modi declare era of 'new trust' in U.S.-India relations

By Julie Pace
The Associated Press

NEW DELHI — President Barack Obama and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared an era of “new trust” in the often fraught relationship between their nations when the U.S. leader opened his three-day visit to New Delhi.

Standing side by side at the stately Hyderabad House, Obama and Modi cited progress toward putting in place a landmark civil nuclear agreement, as well as advances on climate change and defense ties.

But from the start, the day was more about putting their personal bond on display. Modi broke with protocol and wrapped Obama in an enthusiastic hug after Obama got off Air Force One.

Obama later told reporters that Modi’s “strong personal commitment to the U.S.-India relationship gives us an opportunity to further energize these efforts.”

Modi was as effusive. He called Obama by his first name and said “the chemistry that has brought Barack and me closer has also brought Washington and Delhi closer.”

The centerpiece of Obama’s visit was the annual Republic Day festivities, which got underway on a foggy, rain-soaked morning in New Delhi. The crowd erupted in cheers as Obama, along with first lady Michelle Obama, emerged from his armored black limousine and took his seat next to Modi on a viewing stand overlooking the parade route.

Republic Day marks the anniversary of India’s democratic constitution going into force. The parade, which weaved its way past the imposing India Gate monument and a memorial to the unknown soldier, is part Soviet-style display of India’s military hardware and part Macy’s-Thanksgiving-Day-type parade, with floats highlighting India’s cultural diversity.

Obama’s presence would have been unlikely only a few years ago.

Relations between the U.S. and India hit a low in 2013 after an Indian diplomat was arrested and strip-searched in New York over allegations that she lied on visa forms to bring her maid to the U.S. while paying the woman a pittance. The official’s treatment caused outrage in New Delhi, and India retaliated against U.S. diplomats.

The U.S. and India also were at an impasse over implementing the civil nuclear agreement signed in 2008. The U.S. insisted on tracking fissile material it supplied to India. Also, Washington was frustrated by Indian legal liability provisions that have discouraged U.S. companies from capitalizing on new energy development in India because of concerns about their legal responsibilities in the event of a nuclear power plant accident.

During the trip, Obama said he and Modi had reached a “breakthrough understanding” on those areas of disagreements. Details on an accord were sparse.

Ben Rhodes, Obama’s deputy national security adviser, said only that India “moved sufficiently on these issues to give us assurances that the issues are resolved.” U.S.

Indonesia says diplomatic appeals won’t stop drug executions

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia is sticking to its policy of executing drug offenders, including foreigners, and says the withdrawal of the Dutch and Brazil ambassadors will not disturb its diplomatic ties with those countries.

Jakarta brushed aside appeals by foreign leaders and executed six convicted drug traffickers last month. One was an Indonesian woman and five were foreigners — a Vietnamese woman and men from Brazil, Malawi, Nigeria, and the Netherlands.

Foreign ministry spokesman Arrmanatha Nasir repeated that the country is dealing with a drug emergency.

The nation of 250 million people has extremely strict drug laws and often executes smugglers. More than 138 people are on death row, mostly for drug crimes. About a third of them are foreigners.



PRESIDENTIAL VISIT. U.S. President Barack Obama, left, smiles in the rain during his arrival for Republic Day in New Delhi, India. Obama took in a grand display of Indian military hardware, marching bands, and elaborately dressed camels at the event, becoming the first American leader to be honored as chief guest at India’s annual Republic Day festivities. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

Modi, however, rejected comparisons with China. “India is an independent country, and there is no pressure on us from any country or any person,” he told reporters.

Obama arrived on a Sunday morning to a capital whose normally bustling streets were empty. Police cleared sidewalks as Obama’s motorcade sped to the presidential palace for a welcome ceremony. Obama then visited a memorial to the father of India’s independence movement, Mohandas K. Gandhi.

Obama and Modi spent much of the afternoon in private talks. They broke briefly for a stroll through the gardens of Hyderabad House, the guest house where the leaders held their discussions. Sitting down before cups of tea, both men looked relaxed. They smiled and laughed often as they chatted animatedly.

The president and first lady were hosted at a state dinner featuring a dance performance by a cultural group that performed during Obama’s 2010 visit to India.

Taking some of the luster off the trip, Obama cut his time in India slightly short when he travelled to Saudi Arabia to pay respects to the royal family following the death of King Abdullah. To make the trip to Riyadh, Obama scrapped plans to visit India’s famed white marble Taj Mahal.

Associated Press writer Muneeza Naqvi contributed to this report.

ambassador Richard Verma said the agreement would not require new legislation.

The U.S. and India also agreed to extend a 10-year defense partnership deal and cooperate on the phasedown of hydrofluorocarbons, the greenhouse gasses used for refrigeration and air conditioning.

Still, that was hardly the kind of sweeping climate change agreement the U.S. ultimately has in mind with India. The White House is hoping that the surprise deal with China late last year setting ambitious targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions will influence India and others.

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