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U.S., Singapore get closer to free trade deal

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By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, MAY 30. The American Assistant Trade Representative for Asia-Pacific Affairs, Mr. Ralph F. Ives, has said that bilateral free trade agreements would help "stimulate a global round of trade negotiations".

Mr. Ives, who was here for negotiations with the Singapore Government on a bilateral free trade area (FTA), told presspersons the U.S. hoped that the two countries could have a "cutting-edge, world class" bilateral agreement. The two Governments, who have held three rounds of negotiations, are set to have two more rounds of talks in July and September this year. No date has been set to conclude the talks.

"The two sides discussed a comprehensive range of issues, including trade in goods, customs and rules of origin, trade in services, financial services, telecommunications, e-commerce, investment, textiles, intellectual property rights and dispute settle-

ment," a joint statement said at the end of the discussions, the first since the Bush administration took power. "During this week's session, further progress was achieved on understanding each other's views and enlarging the areas of convergence. As a result of this effort, negotiators produced a May 25, 2001, document of consolidated texts. But, with such a complex and important trade relationship, much work remains," the statement added.

In a separate statement, Prof. Tommy Koh, Ambassador-at-large and leader of the Singapore delegation, said his country was pleased that the Bush administration had agreed to continue the negotiations begun when Mr. Bill Clinton was President. He said the U.S. was a global power with important interests in different parts of the world. While the U.S.-Chile FTA and the Freed Trade of the Americas (FTAA) were symbols of importance of the Western hemisphere to the U.S., Prof. Koh said in the same way, the U.S.-

Singapore FTA and APEC were symbols of importance of the Asia-Pacific to the United States.

Asked when the negotiations would end, Prof. Koh stated that since this would be a legally-binding arrangement, the two sides had to carefully go over the texts. In reply to another question, Mr. Ives stated that the two countries had more time to consider the issues since the Bush administration had taken office.

The U.S. official said Australia and New Zealand had shown interest in negotiating FTAs with his country. Asked about the concern expressed by some ASEAN countries on the proposed U.S.-Singapore FTA, Prof. Koh said some concerns had been expressed by a "close neighbour" of Singapore. However, the bilateral FTA would not be used as a "Trojan horse" for the entry of goods into the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), which is to come into existence by 2003. He added that the rules of origin would be enforced.

Islamic bomb a big threat: Lee Kuan Yew

By Amit Baruah
SINGAPORE, MAY 19. "The Muslim nuclear weapon — which already exists in Pakistan — will travel to other Muslim countries in the years to come," Singapore's Senior Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, has said.

In an interview published in *The Washington Times*, Mr. Lee also said the biggest threat to the world would emanate from challenges to the status quo — from China and India.

On the rapprochement between the U.S. and India as a balance to China's growing geopolitical clout, he said: "It makes good geopolitical sense. India has lost a good 40 years going with the Soviets, and they now realise it." The second biggest threat to stability was from the Persian Gulf. "I would say the Gulf, when those regimes change over the next few years — a transition that will be aggravated by the

Israeli-Palestinian crisis. This is the real tinderbox in the foreseeable future."

Growing fanaticism

After referring to the travel possibilities of Pakistan's "Muslim" nuclear weapon, Mr. Lee said: "Rational people don't worry me. China is rational, so is India, America, Europe and the rest of the world. But not the Islamic fundamentalist elements. I am very worried because this fanaticism is growing in Indonesia, which is next door to us."

On Singapore's changing nature he said: "We have changed and continue to change and cannot possibly predict what we will look like 10 years from now. With the exponential growth of the Internet, we are bound to be a very different society. The people are more involved, sending e-mails to ministers and getting replies. But this doesn't mean we are going to be a Western society..."

"We also have the growing divide, not between Indians and Chinese, and Malays and Chinese, but between the Muslims and non-Muslims. Islam is going through globalising, its disciples are using modern technology to reassert themselves and spread the Muslim message. Throughout 150 years of British rule and 36 years of independence, dress was never an issue. But now the Muslims have made it a major one. I'm sure you have seen the covered heads of women around town. It's part of the worldwide movement. And we have a problem," Mr. Lee contended.

Referring to the U.S., he said people felt squatted upon. There was too much unilateralism and the message was "enough is enough." "I think that there's growing discomfort at the unilateralism that has been accentuated since the Bush administration came to power. It was already there with Clinton, but Clinton

was a master wordsmith and managed to disguise his real intentions. Bush is a straight-talker who speaks what's in his mind. Even when he doesn't intend to, it comes out."

China unstoppable

Maintaining that the U.S. could not prevent China from emerging as a major global player, the Senior Minister said China would become the largest player on this side of the Pacific over two or three decades. "Japan, however advanced and highly developed, South Korea, and even a united Korea, and the rest of Asia cannot balance China... I would go one step further. There is nothing that the Japanese and the Koreans have done that China can't do better in the years to come. You cannot stop them. Shanghai is now a city of almost 15 million and still streaming in, as well as into Shenzhen. Its new Silicon Valley attracts the cream of the crop."

UNESCO recognition for Koodiyattam

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 19. 'Koodiyattam', the Sanskrit theatre tradition of Kerala, has been declared as among the "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity," by UNESCO. It is for the first time that UNESCO has selected art forms from across the world to bestow recognition as part of its effort to safeguard expressions of oral heritage and traditional culture.

'Koodiyattam' was selected from among 32 entries from all over the world. 'Koodiyattam' is a unique theatre tradition which survived in Kerala from an ancient past. It deals with the plays of eminent Sanskrit dramatists such as Bhasa, Harsha, Kalidasa, Maandavikrama and Saktibhadra. While following the performative principles of the larger Indian aesthetic tradition, 'Koodiyattam' has its own distinctive characteristics that are firmly rooted in the culture of Kerala.

Goh plans a smooth handover to Lee

THE STRAITS TIMES
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

SINGAPORE, Jan. 24. — The Prime Minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong, has picked his successor — Brigadier-General (NS) Lee Hsien Loong and set a deadline of 2007 for the hand-over.

The challenge now is to ensure a smooth transition. But Mr Goh seems pretty confident that the new team of younger ministers will continue with the approach and programmes he put in place.

"I don't expect factions to break out. I don't expect personal rivalries or personality conflicts," Mr Goh told *The Straits Times*.

"The next step is to get more people to join the team, and we are consciously looking for people who have followed unconventional careers to join the team... With that team in place, I think succession should be smooth," Mr Goh said.

He sought to allay fears that the compassionate and consultative leadership he stood for would change with the hand-over. "I think it's an unnecessary worry because, if you're referring to DPM, he's a member of my team. He supports what I'm doing totally... The opening up of more political space, the emphasis on the arts, the Edusave programme, the Medifund scheme, they all go to Cabinet."

"The personality may be different, the style may change but, basically, the programmes will be carried through," Mr Goh said.

The Prime Minister says his most important task is to put in place a team to continue his programmes. "Continuity doesn't mean not exploring new ideas but it doesn't represent a U-turn from what I'm doing now or even a 90-degree turn. So you're going to expand the tracks as you move forward."

"I carried on what Mr Lee Kuan Yew did earlier on, of course with my own style and setting some new directions for Singapore, widening space for Singaporeans, politically, in the arts and so on. So I hope to get a team that can carry on with my programmes."

Mr Goh took over seamlessly from Singapore's first Prime Minister in November 1990. His style of leadership has gone down well with many Singaporeans.

By 2007, I will be about 66. So I would like to see a fresh team in charge at that point of time with fresh ideas, strong and young enough to attract support and carry on my goals for Singapore," he said.

Does he have a target year for stepping down? Mr Goh replied: "No, no, because it depends very much on the team and depends on the situation at that particular point of time.

"But my target now is to make sure that a new team with a new Prime Minister will be there in 2007." His preferred successor said it is ultimately up to the MPs and the third-generation leaders to decide among themselves whom they would support.

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