

## **BUSH TOUR / WIDESPREAD PROTESTS**

# **Japan, U.S. reaffirm military alliance**

By P. S. Suryanarayana

**SINGAPORE, OCT. 18.** The U.S. President, George W. Bush, and the Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, have reaffirmed the relevance of their bilateral military alliance in the context of uncertainties in global politics. Mr. Bush today also hinted at enhanced strategic links with the Philippines by hailing the cooperation in the fight against terrorism and pledging to help Manila upgrade its military's skills.

Mr. Bush and Mr. Koizumi met in Tokyo on Friday night at the start of Mr. Bush's seven-day Asia Pacific tour. They did not, however, come to any definitive conclusions about how Japan might be able to 'help' the U.S. in Iraq in the 'spirit' of the alliance that could be traced to the outcome of the Second World War.

Mr. Koizumi did not outline any specific time table regarding the possible deployment of some units of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces in Iraq on "non-combat duties" in line with Tokyo's 'pacifist' Constitution. However, Japan has already hinted that it is studying the situation.

Mr. Bush praised Mr. Koizumi as a friend and strong leader and appreciated Japan's role in the passage of the U.N. Security Council resolution on Iraq. He

said he would welcome the actions that Tokyo could possibly take regarding Iraq. There was, however, nothing in the official account of the Bush-Koizumi meeting to suggest that Tokyo had decided upon a firm course of action.

This strategic aspect attracted attention in the regional diplomatic circles in the more specific context of Japan's financial commitment, already made, towards Iraq's 'reconstruction'. Mr. Koizumi pointed out that Tokyo would help Iraq economically in Japan's own interest and also to sustain the alliance with the U.S.

On economy, Mr. Koizumi did not hold out any firm assurance of allowing the market forces to determine the value of the yen – an irritant in the ties. From the U.S. perspective, Japan is holding out on the yen to retain a competitive edge in exports.

After arriving in Manila later, Mr. Bush met the Filipino President, Gloria Arroyo. Addressing the Congress, he pledged to bring the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) to justice. The ASG is seen in the Philippines as a terrorist group with links to the Al-Qaeda.

Mr. Bush said the U.S. would work closely with South-East Asian countries to "dismantle the Jemaah Islamiyah", the suspected affiliate of the Al-Qaeda.

# Rumsfeld raises troops issue with Japan

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**SINGAPORE, NOV. 15.** The U.S. Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld's visit to East Asia is provoking protests against Washington's 'imperialist' designs, as the American President, George W. Bush's tour did. Mr. Rumsfeld, now in Tokyo, is expected to travel to Okinawa on Sunday and later to South Korea.

The objective of the visit is to commence 'consultations' with old allies like Japan and South Korea on the ways in which Washington could trim its strategic sails to meet its security challenges of the 21st century. However, the issue that has come to dominate is Japan's decision not to send troops, on even a "non-combat mission", to Iraq. The tensions in South Korea-U.S. relations, especially over the former's move to soft-pedal the despatch of its troops to Iraq under American occupation, are expected to cloud Mr. Rumsfeld's visit to Seoul. There was nothing in the

comments made by the U.S. and Japanese sides to indicate if and how exactly Mr. Rumsfeld and the Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, addressed Tokyo's stand on troops. In fact, both exuded much bonhomie in front of the cameras in Tokyo on Friday. However, Mr. Rumsfeld downplayed Tokyo's decision in his comments after a meeting with the Japanese Defence Agency Chief, Shigeru Ishiba, on Saturday. Conceding that sovereign nations were entitled to 'engage' the U.S. in ways they would consider 'appropriate', Mr. Rumsfeld indicated that he did not feel cold-shouldered by Japan. Either to please Mr. Rumsfeld or to put Tokyo's decision in 'perspective', Mr. Ishiba said that Japan would still seek to send troops to Iraq by keeping in focus the security situation there. The North Korean nuclear issue, too, figured, with the U.S. indicating that the interests of Japan would be kept in mind in the event of any security assurances being given to Pyongyang.