

Japan, U.S. pledge to stay the course as allies

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SINGAPORE: Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and United States President George W. Bush on Wednesday pledged to implement their updated military alliance in accordance with the "will of the people" in Japan.

The two leaders, who met in Kyoto, ahead of an Asia-Pacific economic leaders' summit in South Korea, acknowledged that the October 29 accord on the "transformation" of the U.S.-Japan alliance had run into some rough weather.

At a news conference after their talks, Mr. Bush said the U.S. had negotiated the latest accord "in good faith." His "attitude" towards the opposition of the Japanese people, especially those in Okinawa, was that the accord "will work out" on the basis of Mr. Koizumi's "leadership" and the people's will in democratic Japan.

Mr. Koizumi said "the gut feeling of the Japanese people" was against having a [U.S.] base in their neighbourhood, especially when the issue was posed in the "local" context. But the Japanese would "have to pay a certain cost" for ensuring their "security" as a nation with U.S. assistance.

'Message' to China

In a public speech in Kyoto, Mr. Bush said the Chinese leaders "are finding that once the door to freedom is opened even a crack," through economic reforms, "it cannot be closed."

Disclosing that he had told Chinese President Hu Jintao that "the people of China want more freedom to express themselves," Mr. Bush said the U.S. would "encourage" Beijing to "continue down the road of reform and openness."

Arguing that Taiwan had "moved from repression to democracy" as a quintessential "Chinese society," Mr. Bush held this out as a model for China itself.

However, he said he was "not necessarily trying to compare one system to another" and that his "message is universal."

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