

Russia, U.S. clash over Iran n-plan

HD-12
16/10

Open feud brings out starkly differing positions

MOSCOW: Russia and the United States feuded openly on Saturday over Iran's nuclear programme, with Moscow defending Teheran's right to enrich uranium for atomic energy while visiting U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Iran could not be trusted with the process.

Speaking to reporters after discussing the issue, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Dr. Rice staked out starkly differing positions on the specific question of whether the Islamic republic should be allowed to enrich uranium for any purpose.

"All members of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) have this right," Mr. Lavrov said, adding that Russia had seen no evidence to support U.S. claims that Iran sought to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of a civilian nuclear energy programme.

Dr. Rice retorted: "It is not a question of rights... the NPT doesn't come only with rights but also with obligations. This is not an issue of rights but of whether or not the fuel cycle can be trusted in Iran."

Following her talks with Mr. Lavrov, and before leaving Russia for London, Dr. Rice travelled outside Moscow to meet President Vladimir Putin at his official country residence.

The Russian leader evoked Dr. Rice's trip earlier in the week through Central Asia, a region where Moscow and Wash-



NO COMMON VIEW: Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in Moscow on Saturday. — PHOTO: REUTERS

ington are jockeying for influence.

"I would like to congratulate you on the results of your trip to Central Asia, and I know this trip was very successful," Mr. Putin told Dr. Rice.

With a subtle twist of diplomatic irony, he added: "If you could kindly tell us about the results of your trip in greater detail, we would appreciate that."

Dr. Rice said the U.S. felt it had a strong partnership with Russia which allowed the two countries to "get together so frequently and talk on a whole range of issues before us." — AFP

US, Russia to become N-security partners

ASSOCIATED Press
Moscow, October 1

HT-13
7/12

THE TOP US nuclear safety official on Saturday said that the United States and Russia were on track to become partners in providing nuclear security but that Moscow's continued resistance to providing access even to the perimeter of the most sensitive sites was holding up progress.

Linton Brooks, chief of the US National Nuclear Security Administration, said that US officials needed to provide some proof to Congress that US-financed security upgrade work was actually being performed in order to keep up funding.

From the US perspective, the access being requested is "very minimal, (but) I think from the Russian perspective it's unprecedented and so we're working these things out," Brooks said.

Under the Cooperative Threat Reduction programme, now nearly 14 years old, the United States has poured approximately US\$ 7 billion into helping former Soviet republics destroy and safeguard weapons of mass destruction, according to the Washington-based Arms Control Association.

Now Brooks says the focus is

W. Burton ✓

UNITED NATIONS

MOSCOW RESISTANCE

Moscow's continued resistance to providing access even to the perimeter of the most sensitive sites was holding up progress

POURING FUNDS

The United States has poured approximately US\$ 7 billion into helping former Soviet republics destroy and safeguard weapons of mass destruction

FOCUS

The focus is increasingly on moving "from assistance to partnership,"

increasingly on moving "from assistance to partnership," symbolised by a nuclear safety training and maintenance centre he helped inaugurate on Friday in the Arctic port of Severomorsk, the home base of Russia's Northern Fleet.

"One of the things we're trying to do is not just put a bunch of bars on windows and install a bunch of alarm systems but help Russia create a system that doesn't depend on the United States for ensuring sustained security of weapons and materials," he said.

WASHINGTON SUMMIT

Putin And Bush Meet In The Shadow Of Disasters

By VLADIMIR SIMONOV

Vladimir Putin and George Bush, who will meet in Washington on 16 September, will be not the same men who had stood side by side in Red Square in Moscow, watching the 9 May parade held to celebrate the 60th anniversary of VE-Day, or who signed the anti-terrorist declaration at the G8 summit in Gleneagles in July.

In the two months since their last meeting, two events have changed the two presidents' personal and political standing in the eyes of their compatriots and the international community. One was Hurricane Katrina, which has claimed thousands of lives in the United States, and the other was the political tornado in Ukraine.

Only superpower

Katrina razed New Orleans and several other cities in the southern US, leaving thousands homeless, unemployed and without hope. It also undermined the ideological foundations of the US as the world's only superpower.

It showed that the US administration is unable to simultaneously wage wars in order to export American democracy and to fulfil its constitutional duty of ensuring public safety. The geopolitical claims of the Bush administration have clashed with its duty to the homeland.

New Orleans would not have become a giant dead lake if spending on the Iraqi campaign had not forced Washington to cut allocations for the hurricane protection systems of south-eastern Louisiana.

The local authorities received only \$10.6 million from the federal treasury for that project, instead of the \$60 million they had asked for. Four thousand members of the National Guard from Mississippi and 3,000 from

Louisiana could have been dispatched to the affected zone to evacuate the people and stop looters, but they are in Iraq.

The US looks like a giant with

giant foreign policy and ready to listen to the collective reason of the international community. America, which Nature has brought down from the high standing of the global lecturer,



feet of clay, with one foot planted in New Orleans and the other in Baghdad. The furious demonstrations at the White House and the deep dive Bush's rating took to 39 per cent clearly show whom the Americans blame for the belated reaction to the natural disaster and for the generally incompetent management of the crisis.

Outspoken opponent

Putin, who had been an outspoken opponent of the Iraqi war, will not tell Bush "I told you so" at their meeting in Washington. "I am looking at it and I cannot believe what I see", Putin told a US reporter about Katrina. "We are all vulnerable and should cooperate to help each other".

One can assume that Putin would like to see Bush changed by Katrina, pursuing a less arro-

could show more understanding of the problems and justified interests of other countries, notably Russia's traditional interests in the former Soviet territory.

The widest gap dividing the Kremlin and the White House is the difference in their interpretations of political processes in the former Soviet states. The US administration tends to see "colour revolutions" as the triumph of democracy over corrupt regimes. But the Russian leadership sees in these pseudo-revolutions evident signs of anti-constitutional coups planned to redistribute property and infected with the virus of corruption.

Putin repeatedly denounced the attempts at enforced democratisation of Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova, warning about a threat to their stability. The recent acute political crisis in Ukraine is an argument

for the Russian president's stand.

By firing the government of Yuliya Tymoshenko, Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko has admitted to the failure of "orange" ideas. It has become clear that the new Ukrainian leadership was not a tightly knit group of idealists and patriots, as the people in Kiev's Independence Square had thought them to be, but a loose group of politicians with different ideological and business interests. They were united by a desire to satisfy their political ambitions and, as Tymoshenko said, "to steal from the country".

Commitment

Yushchenko assured Bush in a telephone conversation that Kiev "will remain committed to its pro-Western policies" despite the change of the government. Unfortunately for the West, Yushchenko has very few allies left to help him prove this commitment.

Tymoshenko said live on television the day before that by firing her, Yushchenko had "in effect destroyed (their) political alliance and the future of the country".

The "orange revolution" has not brought stability or the promised improvements to Ukraine. The West, which financed the revolution, Russia, which criticised it, and the Ukrainian people, who have become its victims, have not gained anything other than a regime that is ineffective and no less corrupt than the one that was overthrown eight months ago. After all, a street revolt is not an election.

When the two presidents discuss this issue at their Friday summit, George Bush may listen more closely to Vladimir Putin's opinion that "colour revolutions" are a bad road to stability in the post-Soviet territory, which both Russia and the West need after all.

The author is a political analyst associated with Ria Novosti

16 SEP 2005

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USA rejects Putin call on Iraq

WASHINGTON, Aug. 19.

— The USA has rejected Russian President Mr Vladimir Putin's call to set a timetable for pulling its troops out of Iraq and withheld comment on his proposal for an international conference.

US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack yesterday echoed President George Bush's refusal to lay out a calendar for withdrawing the 138,000 US troops battling an insurgency, twenty-eight months after the removal of Saddam Hussein: "As Iraqis stand up their capabilities, we and the multinational forces will be able to stand down," Mr McCormack said. "We have a robust training programme for Iraqi police and security forces that's progressing under the leadership of Gen. David Petraeus, working very closely with the Iraqis." Mr Putin yesterday insisted on a schedule for withdrawing of all foreign troops from Iraq.

— AFP

20 AUG 2005

THE STATESMAN

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Tasks Before New American Ambassador

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By VLADIMIR SIMONOV

The US Ambassador to Russia, Alexander Vershbow, is leaving the country where he has spent four years. Russia will not have too many regrets even though the Ambassador has done nothing wrong.

Vershbow is a brilliant diplomat who arrived in Moscow in July 2001. A few months later, Russian-American relations underwent a dramatic change for the better, but not so much because of the US envoy's diplomatic zeal. Presidents George W Bush and Vladimir Putin were drawn together primarily by the horrible tragedy of 11 September, when Putin offered Bush strategic partnership in combating international terrorism.

First years

Vershbow was lucky that his first years in Russia were marked by what Russian analysts dubbed later the "spell of a sudden alliance". Four years later, this spell seems to be losing its aura, and is giving way to more reserved but realistic positions on the part of the White House and the Kremlin. Meanwhile, average Russians view US intentions towards the country with increasing suspicion. The typical view is that, despite the friendly attitudes of US leaders, they are trying to weaken Russia, oust it from the post-Soviet space, and eventually, subordinate it to their self-centred global interests.

Anti-American attitudes have always been quite pronounced in Russia, running very high after the war against Yugoslavia in 1999. The attack on New York replaced them temporarily with compassion and solidarity, but suspicion came back with the invasion of Iraq, and later with political gambling on the post-Soviet space. Russians accuse the United States of blatantly invading a sphere of Russia's historic

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interests when they see Washington trying to squeeze Georgia, Ukraine and other CIS countries into an American-centred model of the world.

Ambassador Vershbow leaves his position at a time when US popularity in Russia has dropped far below what it was at the start of his Moscow tenure. This is not

space were fully transparent and decent; and that events in Georgia and Ukraine were not provoked by the US, but prompted by local desires for a free society.

These were fine words befitting the status of the US Ambassador. Now he only has to persuade US House Representative Ron Paul to drop his de-



a very good result for the head of the diplomatic mission. But Vershbow is not personally responsible for this. He was the very familiar face of a pushy and offensive America that will not stop lecturing the rest of the world — which does not even want to listen.

Countless lectures

The Ambassador toured the whole of Russia, gave hundreds of interviews, delivered countless lectures; had numerous meetings with policymakers, businessmen, and especially human rights activists. He tried passionately to prove that Washington had good intentions towards Russia: that the US did not encourage velvet revolutions in CIS countries; that US humanitarian programmes in Russia and the rest of the post-Soviet

mand to set up an independent commission to investigate illegal funding of Viktor Yushchenko's election campaign by US groups.

In his address to the House entitled "US Hypocrisy in Ukraine", Ron Paul said: "We do not know exactly how many millions — or tens of millions — of dollars the United States government spent on the presidential election in Ukraine. We do know that much of that money was targeted to assist one particular candidate, and through a series of cut-out non-governmental organisations (NGOs) — both American and Ukrainian — millions of dollars ended up in support of the presidential candidate, Viktor Yushchenko".

Nobody intends, or can, prevent the US from contributing to enhancing the security of CIS

countries, integrating them into the global economy, and promoting democracy there. But certain circles are trying to neutralise Russia's influence in countries with which it has been linked culturally and economically for centuries, and where more than 25 million Russians reside. The US Ambassador to Moscow quite often acted as a mouthpiece for these circles.

During his four years in Moscow, Vershbow made a huge effort to prove that America was disenchanted by the slow progress of civil society in Russia, by its controlled democracy and impending authoritarian rule, and by a clampdown on the Russian media.

Free enterprise

Having made a leap from centralised economy to free enterprise, democracy in Russia is far from perfect. Moscow always welcomes constructive criticism. But an honest observer of Russia's political life will never say that the mass media enjoyed more freedom under Boris Yeltsin, for one. The oligarchs simply bought poor TV channels and newspapers that came to serve their sponsors instead of being sources of information. It was under Putin that Yeltsin's tax evasion loopholes were abolished and that the media received more transparent and independent sources of funding.

Russia and the United States have common goals. They should pool their efforts against international terrorism, unstable countries trying to get mass destruction weapons for dubious purposes, against corruption and protectionism that are interfering with bilateral trade. But new mediators, a new style of work, and a new tone of communication are required to use this potential in full. Vershbow's successor will have to work hard.

Bush takes Russia jab over Baltic states

Riga (Latvia), May 7 (Reuters): President George W. Bush denounced Soviet Cold War rule of eastern Europe as "one of the greatest wrongs of history" today in a jab at Moscow two days before celebrations of the 1945 victory over Hitler.

Bush, visiting Latvia before the ceremonies in Moscow marking 60 years since the end of World War II in Europe, also held up the three Baltic states as examples of democratic reform since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

He said the end of the war brought liberty from fascism for many in Germany but meant the "iron rule of another empire" for the Baltic states — Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia — and nations from Poland to Romania.

Bush admitted the US shared some responsibility for the Cold War division of Europe after the 1945 Yalta accord between Russia, the US and Britain.

"Once again, when powerful governments negotiated, the freedom of small nations was somehow expendable," he said. "Yet this attempt to sacrifice freedom for the sake of stability left a continent divided and unstable."

"The captivity of millions in central and eastern Europe will be remembered as one of the greatest wrongs of history," he said in a speech at Riga's guildhall. The three Baltic states joined both Nato and the EU last year.

Bush's visit to Riga has an-



President George Bush in Riga, Latvia. (Reuters)

gered Russia by reviving tensions about the Soviet occupation when Moscow is focusing on celebrating the end of World War II, a conflict that cost 27 million Soviet lives. Russian President Vladimir Putin dismissed calls by the Baltic states for an apology for Soviet rule and accused them today of trying to cover up past Nazi collaboration.

The differing versions of history may make for frictions when Bush meets Putin in Moscow tomorrow and Monday. Putin insists the Red Army was a liberator, not an oppressor, of Eastern Europe.

"Our people not only defended their homeland, they

liberated 11 European countries," Putin said today after laying a wreath at a monument to Russia's war dead.

In a recent state of the nation speech he bemoaned the demise of the Soviet Union as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century". He has also said Washington should not try to export its own brand of democracy.

Bush said Russia's leaders had made "great progress" in the past 15 years. "In the long run it is the strength of Russian democracy that will determine the greatness of Russia and I believe the Russian people value their freedom and will settle for no less," he said.

U.S. - Russia

Presidents face hard work in Moscow

Alexander Kononov

THE MAIN purpose of American President George W. Bush's visit to Moscow from May 23 is to attend the celebrations of the 60th Anniversary of VE Day. Normally, such visits do not include a busy work programme because there is simply no time. However, judging by the serious preparatory work conducted by U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice during her recent visit to Moscow, the schedule of President Bush's visit to the Russian capital will be as busy as it is festive.

The number of topics for the two Presidents to discuss is increasing, which would have certainly been a positive sign, had they not been overshadowed by growing tension, reciprocal distrust, and a lack of understanding in relations between Russia and the U.S. Presidents Bush and Vladimir Putin will undoubtedly address the most urgent problems during their meetings in Moscow.

First, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and fissionable materials. This problem is not new, but the U.S. is currently concerned about two practical aspects: the Iranian nuclear programme, and security at Russian nuclear facilities. Both Moscow and Washington are categorically opposed to Iran becoming a nuclear power by acquiring nuclear weapons. In this sense their interests coincide. The disagreement comes with the choice of the best way to achieve the desired result.

The U.S. has stated on numerous occasions that it is ready to use force to halt the Iranian military nuclear program. Russia pursues the opposite strategy. The day before Ms. Rice arrived in Moscow, the deputy secretary of the

Presidents Vladimir Putin and George Bush have a range of sticky issues to sort out at their upcoming summit.

Iranian Supreme National Security Council, Hussein Musavian, visited the Russian capital. The Kremlin wanted to receive assurances from the Iranian leadership that it would uphold its moratorium on uranium enrichment and that an agreement would be signed on the return to Russia of spent nuclear fuel from the Bushehr nuclear power plant. Spent fuel can be used to make weapon-grade plutonium.

However, given that few people in America believe a political solution could be found to the problem of Iran's nuclear programme, for the first time in the last 25 years, the U.S. Congress announced a plan to spend \$3 million on supporting democracy in Iran. At the same time, Washington is still considering using force. Several weeks ago, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld spent two days visiting Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan, literally circling Iran in an attempt to find the best bridgehead for a possible military operation against that country.

The security of Russian nuclear facilities is another "old subject" of Russian-U.S. talks. During the summit in Bratislava, the sides signed a joint statement on cooperation in the sphere of nuclear security. The statement focusses on stricter control over weapons-grade fissionable materials and components of nuclear weapons. During the Soviet era, Russia traditionally addressed this problem by imposing strict criteria

on personnel working with nuclear weapons and their components, rather than through the use of sophisticated technology.

In the new economic situation and with the emergence of transnational terrorist networks that want to acquire nuclear weapons, the need for advanced equipment to protect and maintain control over nuclear weapons in Russia has greatly increased. The U.S. is interested in providing this equipment and helping Russia to prevent nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists.

Access to Americans

However, the Bratislava statement became something of a detective story. The Russian version of the text, posted on the Kremlin web site, contained a paragraph suggesting that the American inspectors would gain access to Russia's nuclear facilities as early as this year. The next day, this paragraph was removed, and the authorities told the press that a copy of an interim and uncoordinated document had been made public due to a "computer glitch"; the Russian Government did not intend to allow American inspectors to visit the country's nuclear facilities.

However, during her visit to Moscow, Ms. Rice announced after a dinner with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, that she had secured better access for American experts to these facil-

ities, but there was still some work to be done. This work has apparently been left for the Presidents. All this suggests that the problem of U.S. inspections of Russian nuclear facilities has been discussed and will remain on the agenda in the future.

President Putin's administration simply does not want to attract too much attention to the subject from Russia's radical political groups. After all, these groups have already accused the President of betraying national interests, jeopardising Russia's sovereignty and transferring control over Russia's nuclear facilities to the Americans.

These accusations are certainly groundless and amateurish. No one is inviting the Americans to visit the Command Centre of the Strategic Missile Forces or allowing them access to nuclear missile control systems. The inspections might also be organised so they do not include the most sensitive nuclear weapons manufacturing facilities. The U.S. does not need these nuclear secrets, though. The Americans know how to make nuclear weapons as well as the Russians do. But when it comes to the security of nuclear facilities, the U.S. could provide a great deal of necessary assistance.

Secondly, post-Soviet territory: increased authoritarian tendencies in Russia, the "colour" revolutions and their results.

The Presidents will have to work out a "code of conduct" on the post-Soviet territory. The Kremlin is very sensitive about U.S. actions that lead to a decline in Russia's influence in traditional zones. During her recent visit to Moscow, Ms. Rice did everything to reassure the Russian leadership that U.S. policy in the former Soviet Union was not focussed on damaging Russia's interests. "...we see this as not a zero-sum game, but one in which everybody has much to gain, when there are prosperous, democratic countries in the area of the neighbouring states around Russia," she stated.

Unfortunately, Georgia, Ukraine and particularly Kyrgyzstan cannot be considered either prosperous or even economically developed countries, and the former two have already developed a number of problems in relations with Russia. In general, persistent attempts to spread the U.S. model of democracy often work against the United States itself.

It would be inappropriate to address the situation with the U.S. presence in Iraq here, but it is worth mentioning that America, loyal to its "vision of democracy," helped the democratic opposition in Kyrgyzstan. However, it could hardly have expected that the democratic revolution would turn into violence, looting and plunder. Fortunately, the authorities have managed to take the situation under control, for now, but the Kyrgyz opposition remains weak and fragmented.

Meanwhile, the desire for political reforms affects regional specifics and intensifies clan confrontation and ethnic antagonisms.

In an attempt to provide assistance to the democratic opposition without knowing the regional specifics of the country, the U.S. inadvertently helped bolster the positions of radical Islamic circles, which is hardly in its interests. Therefore, it is certainly in the interests of both Washington and Moscow to conduct common and coordinated policies on post-Soviet territory, in accordance with the principle formulated by Ms. Rice: "My message... will be that a democratic and vibrant and prosperous Russia is in everyone's interests... Our relationship with Russia holds enormous potential." — RIA Novosti

(The writer is President of the Russian Institute for Strategic Assessments.)

03 MAY 2005 THE HINDU

Russia, US clash over Belarus 'dictator'

Vilnius/Moscow: Russia and the United States clashed on Belarus on Thursday as Moscow's foreign minister rebuffed a call by US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice for change in what she branded central Europe's "last true dictatorship".

"We would not of course advocate what some people call 'regime change' anywhere," Sergei Lavrov told a news conference at a meeting between NATO and Russia in the Lithuanian capital.

He was responding to remarks by Rice on Wednesday that Lukashenko ran "the last true dictatorship in the centre of Europe", and that "it's time for change to come to Belarus".

Rice retaliated immediately by meeting Belarus opposition leaders in a show of support for pro-democracy groups in the ex-Soviet state despite Russian concerns that the United States was interfering in its traditional sphere of influence.

"While it may seem difficult and long, at times even far away, there will be a road to democracy in Belarus," the top US diplomat told a group of Belarussian ac-



Rice meets Belarussian opposition leaders at the Reval Hotel in Vilnius on Thursday

tivists. She said there was nothing wrong with Washington supporting pro-democracy groups—as it did last year during Ukraine's "Orange revolution" which helped create a pro-Western government—if it led to Belarussians throwing off the "yoke of tyranny".

European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana agreed with Rice's call for change. "There is no doubt that the time has come for change. I have said that many, many, many years ago," Solana, who also met the opposition activists, told reporters. He urged the opposi-

tion to unite against Lukashenko and called for a free media to be allowed to operate in Belarus. "Civil society and opposition should unite, if possible around one candidate, in the upcoming 2006 presidential elections," Solana's spokesman Juri Laas said.

Belarus Defiant

Meanwhile, Belarus struck back at the United States on Thursday over comments that it remained the last dictatorship in Europe, with a top diplomat saying that the former Soviet republic honored its Presi-

dent Alexander Lukashenko. "The people of Belarus pick their government, and the people of Belarus have the right to pick their future fate—and this is not something that can be done by Condoleezza Rice," deputy foreign minister Viktor Gaysonak told reporters. "We are not a part of someone else's game and we are not pawns on a chessboard."

After the pro-democracy revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, the US has trained its sights on its long-time nemesis Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus since 1994.

Agencies

22 APR 2005

THE HINDU

Rice upbeat about US-Russia ties

Associated Press

MOSCOW, April 20. — US Secretary of State Ms Condoleezza Rice, speaking before a meeting with Russian President Mr Vladimir Putin, gave an unusually upbeat account today of US-Russian cooperation on international issues.

"We see Russia as a strategic partner in stopping the spread of nuclear weapons," Ms Rice said. "We see Russia as a partner in solving regional issues, like the Balkans or West Asia." In an interview with the radio station Ekho



Ms Condoleezza Rice at the 'Echo of Moscow' on Wednesday. — AFP

Moskvy, one of Russia's few remaining independent media voices, Ms Rice also

mentioned Russian cooperation with the US and other countries in efforts to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons capability. "Russia is not a strategic enemy," Ms Rice said, suggesting that the two countries have worked well together since the final years of the communist rule.

In the interview, Ms Rice made scant reference to US concern about setbacks in Russia's democratic development. She only briefly mentioned the great concentration of power under the president and the need for free

media to help people decide their fates.

Ms Rice, however, did not mention the other areas of tension. These include what US officials perceive to be Russian inaction in curbing violations of US intellectual property rights, including videos and computer software. Washington also contends that Russia has a poor record on stemming human trafficking.

The radio station invited listeners to vote on whether they consider US an ally or an adversary. The vote was 54:46 in favour of "ally."

21 APR 2006

THE STATESMAN

Putin has too much personal power: Rice

Moscow, April 20 (Reuters): US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice renewed her criticism of Russia's democratic record today and said President Vladimir Putin had too much personal power.

Rice, on her first visit to Moscow as Washington's top diplomat, also said the US would be watching the outcome of oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky's trial "to see what (it) says about the rule of law in Russia".

A Moscow court is to hand down a verdict in Khodorkovsky's fraud trial on April 27.

Her remarks, which included charges that Russia had no independent television channels, were unlikely to reach most Russians since all leading TV networks failed to report them.

TV kept reports of her visit brief and relegated them to a low position on news programmes, though newspapers and radios that enjoy greater independence gave her a warmer welcome.

Speaking in a live interview with Ekho Moskvyy radio before meeting Putin, Rice renewed charges that Russia had some distance to go in de-

veloping its democracy, including allowing the growth of an independent media free from Kremlin pressure.

And though Rice couched her criticism in diplomatic tones, she singled out the powers that Putin had accumulated since taking over in 2000.

"All that we are saying is that for the US-Russia relationship to really deepen and

for Russia to gain its full potential there needs to be democratic development.

"There should not be so much concentration of power just in the presidency, there needs to be an independent media... so that the Russian people can debate and decide together the democratic future of Russia," she said.

Foreign minister Sergei

Lavrov said the issue of the Kremlin leader's powers had not figured on the formal agenda, although his comments suggested it was touched upon informally.

Envoy in linguistic ordeal

Moscow, April 20 (Reuters): US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice tried out her rusty Russian in a Moscow radio interview today, only to get caught out by a question on whether she might run for president.

"Da (Yes)," Rice answered in Russian, before realising her misunderstanding and hastily adding: "Nyet" (No) — seven times. Rice's interview on Ekho Moskvyy radio turned into a linguistic ordeal when the Soviet expert fielded a schoolgirl listener's question on how she achieved her career success. "It's too complicated to answer!" Rice started out in English. She then switched into Russian, but quickly hit trouble.

Apparently meaning to say that she would like to do her next interview in the language of her host, she chose a verb that sounded more like "to earn money" than the Russian for "to do".

US-Russia ties: Saved for now?

Though the recent Bush-Putin meeting ended predictably with handshakes and smiles, all is not well with bilateral relations, writes DMITRY V SUSLOV

9/3 59-9
THE recent summit between Presidents Bush and Putin ended without acrimony. By accentuating the "positive" side of the ledger – enhanced cooperation in nuclear security and fighting terrorism – and relegating differences over democracy to second place, Bush also placed pragmatism over ideology. However, the leaders failed to design a new agenda, leaving relations still tense and fragmented.

Now, both sides face a crucial choice: Either Washington opts for selective cooperation in areas essential to US security, paying lip service to Russia's domestic situation, while "forgetting" about Russia in world decision-making – or both parties try to bridge the gulf, designing a cohesive global agenda. Should the USA choose the first course, things could end up badly for both parties.

The most serious reason for the US-Russia tension is Moscow's retreat from the accepted norms of democracy. The unfair 2003 parliamentary campaign; crackdowns on independent television; dismantling of oil giant Yukos to the benefit of senior officials; executive control over the judiciary; abolition of direct election of regional governors – all these actions eroded the platform of common democratic values.

Also of crucial importance is the clash over the Commonwealth of Independent States – namely, the controversial Ukraine polls and the "frozen" conflicts: Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria. After these regions declared independence from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova in early '90s, the international community failed to recognise them as states. Even so, these states find Russia increasingly unattractive because of its authoritarian domestic policy, crude interference in neighbour's elections and support for corrupt and unpopular elite. Meanwhile, dismayed by Russia's inefficiency, the USA now looks toward Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine (where pro-US elites have taken power) to create a regional system of security without Russia's participation. However, this would be impossible without first ensuring the territorial integrity of the disputed states – that is, resolving those conflicts.

Washington views Moscow as the primary force behind the unrecognised states' independence. Moreover, Russia's regional conduct, coupled with its retreat from democratic standards, revives old fears about Russian imperialism. This can result in only one policy: Pushing Russia out of the CIS.

Also troubling are Russia's relations with Iran and Syria. Moscow consciously speeded up cooperation with them on the eve of the Bratislava summit, a sort of "asymmetric reply" to



Bush, President of the Slovak Republic Ivan Gasparovic and Putin at the Bratislava Castle. — AFP

the US involvement in Ukrainian polls and opposition movements throughout the CIS. If this cooperation turns out to be not just a tit-for-tat, but more a demonstration of Russia's decision to bury the past policy of cooperation, this could bode ill for both Russia and the USA.

The common Western response of blaming Putin is misplaced: The problem lies with the people around him, the lack of transparency in state machinery and an inability to listen to civil society and the international community. A substantial segment of the Russian elite (the "political technologists" and corrupt bureaucracy) has demonised the USA in order to protect their sizeable incomes from nationalisation of assets, as well as for "accomplishing" (usually ineffective) foreign policy "missions", such as getting Russia's favourite candidate elected in Ukraine.

Indeed, democracy and a transparent market economy would disturb their cushy jobs and shadowy incomes; these US demands would be suicidal for their careers. Thus, their emergence as the strongest opponents of Western "interference" in Russian internal affairs is not surprising. Moreover, having lost all foreign policy advantages Russia previously enjoyed, Putin's advisors can't be expected to blame their own incompetence. Instead, they have tried to convince Putin of US complicity in the majority of Russia's troubles.

Putin's acceptance of these conspiracy theories would be self-defeating; they completely counter his previous foreign policy course. From Soviet-era experience, he should know open confrontation with the West would result in collapse of the country. However, the whispers of "American plots" seem to have monopolised Putin's ear. His inner-circle members were the only ones he trusted five years ago, and they made the best of it. In his first term, Putin still could resist and overplay their influence. Despite their objections, he granted US military access to Central Asia. Now, facing shocking state inefficiency and considering sometimes arrogant and ineffective US policies, Putin is losing his independent judgment.

This basic mistrust explains the patchy Bratislava accord: selective cooperation in some areas (nuclear terrorism, arms control), confrontation on the others (democracy, CIS, Iran) and mutual alienation on the majority of issues.

Russia's modernisation is impossible without the USA. Decision-making in world policy is also dependent on ties with Washington. For the USA, a declining agenda with Russia will sooner or later result in overextension of US resources and global disaster. Short- and middle-term reasons for engaging Russia lie in policy toward

North Korea, Iraq, Iran and China, and the long-term in West Asia. Russia, with its imperial history, vast experience and readiness to invest in security, is the only US ally capable of collaborating to bring about West Asia stability – a rather imperial, but necessary mission. Neither Europe nor the southern CIS have the resources to accomplish the task. Despite an EU presence in Afghanistan and some contribution to Iraq, Europe's political culture and growing Muslim populations do not allow for serious investments in missions like occupation and state building.

Ultimately, Washington and Moscow must work together, despite all the difficulties and prejudices. They should strengthen those elements of agenda – creating the Nato-Russia Council and Russian participation in the G8 – that may still facilitate cooperation and joint action. The US-Russia foreign policy priority should be stabilisation and governance promotion in the broader West Asia. Radical Islamic terrorism and nuclear proliferation are facets of one single problem: degradation of this region.

Putin's appreciation of power – and his readiness to use it – could allow him to realise the objective necessity to become a good US partner, but only if Russia's almost desperate domestic situation is changed, or at least better managed. "Containing Putin's authoritarianism" is already off the Bush agenda. Russia's domestic situation is so unstable and explosive, its state apparatus so ineffective, and the majority of bureaucrats so frightened (and deaf at the same time), that an overt attempt to stop Putin would produce an opposite result: a severe blowback on the part of the regime, which would finally destabilise the situation altogether. However, a disaster might come even sooner should the USA consider a "regime change" in Russia itself. The result would be either total chaos – with an uncontrollable nuclear arsenal – or an authoritarian nationalist regime.

The outlet for the USA to strengthen Russian democracy is through continuing dialogue with Putin, and cautious actions that disprove his advisors' arguments. Possibilities include real support to stabilise the CIS, avoiding indirect help to Chechen separatists, easing access of Russian non-fuel goods to the Western markets, and strengthening Russian civil society by intensified US-Russian civil society dialogue. The Bush administration must convince Putin that it is truly interested in a stable, strong and integral Russia. As for the foreign policy agenda, its basis should be stabilisation and governance promotion in the broader West Asia.

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"U.S. hid Pakistan role in nuclear deals"

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, MARCH 20. The Bush administration told its Asian allies earlier this year that Pyongyang had exported nuclear material to Libya when the shipment first went to Pakistan, reports *The Washington Post*.

The claims were significant in that it was the first allegation that North Korea was trying to create a new nuclear weapons state. According to officials who have briefed the paper, this is not what American intelligence agencies had reported. According to intelligence, North Korea sold uranium hexafluoride to Pakistan which then sold it to Libya. It is maintained that the U.S. had no evidence that Pyongyang knew of the Pakistani-Libyan transaction.

Unnamed officials have said the U.S. had concealed the Pakistani role because it is America's top ally in the war against terror and in the hunt for the Al-Qaeda leaders. It is also said the North Korean-Pakistani tie up would not have been news to allies who have for years known of such dubious transfers. But the allies, who were worked on to further isolate Pyongyang, became increasingly more doubtful as they learnt that the U.S. had omitted key details in the transactions.

The White House has declined comment on the new details but a statement attributed to an official says the U.S. shared with allies an "accurate account" of North Korea's nuclear proliferation activities.

In the briefings by U.S. officials, the paper says, there was no indication that American intelligence agencies believed that the nuclear material had been bought by Pakistan

এফ-১৬ নিয়ে পাকিস্তানকে আশ্বাস দিলেন না কভোলিজা

ইসলামাবাদ, ১৭ মার্চ: সন্ত্রাসবাদ দমনে মুশারফ প্রশাসনের প্রশংসা করলেও এফ-১৬ যুদ্ধ বিমান দেওয়ার বিষয়ে পাকিস্তানকে স্পষ্ট আশ্বাস দিলেন না কভোলিজা রাইস। হতাশ পাক প্রশাসনের বড় অংশের ধারণা, পরমাণু প্রযুক্তি পাচার নিয়ে আমেরিকার উদ্বেগের জন্যই এফ-১৬ নিয়ে মার্কিন বিদেশসচিব প্রতিশ্রুতি দিতে চাননি।

রাইস সরাসরি কিছু বলেননি ঠিকই, তবে আব্দুল কাদির খানের পরমাণু প্রযুক্তি পাচার চক্র সম্পর্কে যে রকম কড়া মন্তব্য আজ তিনি করেছেন তাতে এমন মনে করা স্বাভাবিক। রাইস বলেছেন, কাদিরের চক্র শুধু আমেরিকা নয়, পাকিস্তান এবং গোটা অঞ্চলের পক্ষে বিপজ্জনক। তাই একে পুরোপুরি ভেঙে ফেলতে হবে। আর সেই লক্ষ্যে আমেরিকা একাধিক দেশের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ রেখে চলেছে।

পাক প্রেসিডেন্ট পারভেজ মুশারফ ও প্রধানমন্ত্রী শওকত আজিজের সঙ্গে রাইসের বৈঠকের পরে পাক সংবাদমাধ্যমের বিশ্লেষণ, 'পরমাণু কেলেঙ্কারি' প্রকাশ হয়ে যাওয়ার পরে এফ-১৬-এর বিষয়টি অনেক জটিল হয়ে গিয়েছে। পাক প্রশাসনের কর্তাদের উদ্ধৃত করে বলা হচ্ছে, পাক-ইরান পরমাণু সহযোগিতাই এফ-১৬ বিক্রি সম্পর্কে আমেরিকার দোলাচলের কারণ। তবে ৭০টি এফ-১৬ পাওয়ার জন্য ইসলামাবাদ দরবার চালিয়ে যাবে বলে পাক প্রশাসন সুত্রের খবর।

রাইসের সঙ্গে বৈঠকে মুশারফ কাম্বীর-সমস্যা সমাধানে ফের আমেরিকার সাহায্য চেয়েছেন। তিনি রাইসকে বলেছেন, "মূল বিতর্কের মীমাংসা ছাড়া এই অঞ্চলে স্বাভাবিকতা আসবে না।" আত্মবর্ধক ব্যবস্থার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে আলোচনার প্রক্রিয়াতেও চোখে পড়ার মতো উন্নতি চাই। এই প্রক্রিয়ায়

মার্কিন সহযোগিতা চেয়েছেন মুশারফ। রাইস বলেন, দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্কের ক্ষেত্রে আমেরিকা সাহায্য করতে সব সময় রাজি, কিন্তু হস্তক্ষেপ নয়। পাকিস্তানে গণতন্ত্র ফেরানো নিয়ে কথা না-হলেও পাকিস্তানকে মুসলিম দুনিয়ার জন্য 'আদর্শ দেশ' বলে মন্তব্য করেন রাইস।

এ দিকে, এক দিনের সফরে আফগানিস্তানে গিয়ে নবনির্বাচিত প্রেসিডেন্ট হামিদ কারজাইয়ের প্রশাসনের সঙ্গে গণতন্ত্র, সন্ত্রাস-মোকাবিলা ও মাদক ব্যবসা নিয়ে কথা বলেছেন রাইস। মার্কিন বিদেশসচিব জানান, আফগানিস্তানকে দীর্ঘমেয়াদি সহযোগিতা দিতে আমেরিকা দায়বদ্ধ। রাইস কাবুলে থাকাকালীন কন্দহরে আজ বিস্ফোরণে অন্তত ৫ জনের মৃত্যু হয়েছে, আহত হয়েছেন ৩১ জন। বিস্ফোরণের পিছনে তালিবানেরা আঙে বলে সন্দেহ। — পি টি আই, রয়টার্স

Powell threatened Pak with public disclosure

That's All US Could Do In A Q Khan Case: Study

By Chidanand Rajghatta/TNN

Washington: Former US Secretary of State Colin Powell warned Pakistan that Washington would go public with news of A Q Khan's nuclear proliferation in order to force his arrest, a new study has revealed.

"We know so much about this that we're going to go public with it, and within a few weeks, okay? And you need to deal with this before you have to deal with it publicly," Powell reportedly told Gen Musharraf in early 2004. According to Powell, "the next thing we knew, A Q Khan had been put in custody".

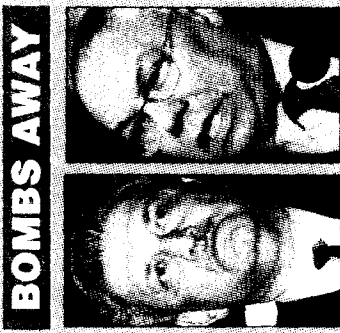
But that is pretty much all the US has accomplished, the study 'Unraveling the A Q Khan and Future Proliferation Networks' by David Albright and Corey Hinderstein of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), suggests. Pakistan has since stymied all US and international efforts to further investigate the case.

"Although the IAEA has been allowed to submit written questions that Khan will answer, this type of exchange is not a substitute for direct access to Khan and his associates," the study says.

Albright and Hinderstein are also leery of claims by Islamabad that the Pakistan govern-

ment was not involved in the proliferation and the serial denials on this score by its foreign office, jocularly known in some circles as the ministry of denials.

The Khan network could not have evolved without the utter corruption and dishonesty of successive Pakistani govern-



ments which, for almost two decades were quick to deny any involvement by its scientists in illicit procurement, they say. They blocked internal investigations and hindered outside investigations of known cases. Pakistani leaders routinely denied that Khan was involved in any transfers of gas centrifuges, despite frequent reports to the contrary.

The paper is also critical of the US policy towards Pakistan on the proliferation issue.

"Too often in the 1980s and 1990s, the United States put other priorities ahead of exposing Khan and putting him out of business," it says. "Even today, the US has not demonstrated that it places an equal priority on unraveling the activities of the Pakistani members of the Khan network as it does on maintaining Islamabad's support for hunting down Al Qaida terrorists in Pakistan."

The paper also provides startling new details of how Pakistani scientists, in addition to providing the means to produce fissile material, gave Libya information necessary to build a nuclear weapon, including detailed nuclear weapons component designs, component fabrication information, and nuclear weapons assembly instructions.

The documents appear to have been information that Pakistan received from China in the early 1980s, the study reveals. They included detailed, dated, handwritten notes in English taken during lectures given by Chinese nuclear weapons experts who were named by the notetakers. These notetakers appear to have been working for Khan, based on their cryptic notations deriding a rival Pakistani nuclear weapons program led by Munir Khan, the chairman of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Organisation.

Pearl murder suspect held after shoot-out

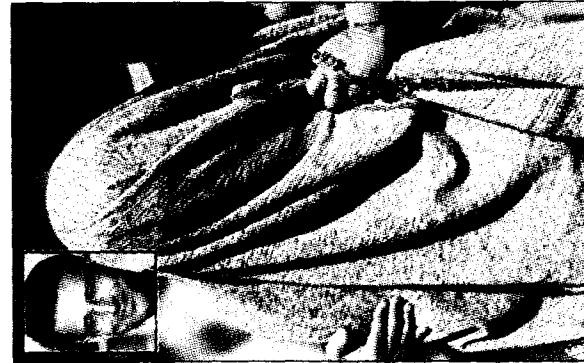
Karachi: Pakistan police have arrested a man wanted in the murder of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl and already sentenced to death in absentia for a hotel bombing that killed 11 French engineers.

His arrest followed a shoot-out here on Wednesday. The suspect, Mohammed Sohail, was among six people who fired on police from a motorcycle during the confrontation, said Fayyaz Khan, a Karachi police investigator.

He said the shooting began when a patrol asked the men to stop at a routine checkpoint in the city, the site of frequent attacks by Islamic militants. The five other suspects fled, but Sohail fell off one of the motorcycles and was captured, Khan said.

No policemen were injured in the shooting and it was not known whether the attackers suffered any casualties.

After his arrest, Sohail confessed to being a member of the outlawed Islamic militant group, Harkat Jihad-e-Islami, Khan said.



Mohammed Sohail, the alleged killer of Daniel Pearl (inset)

In 2003, a court in Karachi sentenced Sohail to death in absentia for involvement in a May 8, 2002 car bombing in front of the Sheraton Hotel in Karachi which killed 11 Frenchmen, Khan said.

The Pakistani government had been offering a reward of 2.5 million rupees for information leading to his arrest.

Two other militants, both in custody, have been sentenced to death in the attack that killed the French nationals, who were helping build a submarine for the Pakistani navy. Sohail was allegedly a close aide of Amjad Hussain Farooqi, one of Al Qaida's reputed point men. Khan said Sohail was also believed to have played a role in Pearl's abduction, but he did not give details.

Another police official, requesting anonymity, said Sohail would be interrogated about suspicions that he shot the grisly video that showed Pearl's throat being slit with a knife. Pearl, who was doing a story on Islamic militancy, was kidnapped on January 23, 2002, and later beheaded in Karachi.

Russia, US very close: Putin

Agence France-Presse
Bratislava, February 25

RUSSIA AND the United States are "very close" on key international questions, Russian President Vladimir Putin said in giving an upbeat assessment of his summit with US President George W. Bush. Putin said Thursday's summit in Bratislava had set the stage for US-Russian cooperation in Bush's second term.

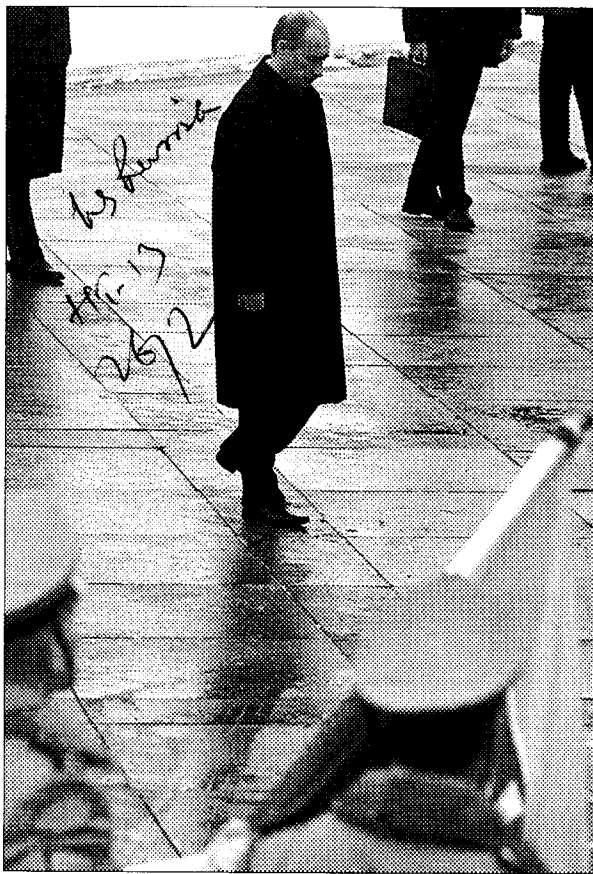
Speaking to the press after meeting Slovakian President Ivan Gasparovic, Putin said that he and Bush had "discussed major international issues such as Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

"We are very close on all these issues." "The discussion was very useful and full. It was not only the conclusion of four years of cooperation but also an opening to the future," Putin said, referring to Bush's first term as president and the beginning of the US leader's second term this January.

Putin said that he was "satisfied" with his talks with Bush and that he thought the Americans were also pleased, but commentators have said the summit had echoes of the Cold War as disagreements lingered on key issues.

Pressed by Bush to do more to protect democracy in Russia, Putin gave little ground over the United States' concerns that Moscow is backsliding on democratic values such as checks and balances and the rule of law.

During a joint press con-



Russian President Vladimir Putin walks to the World War II monument of Slavin in Bratislava on Friday.

ference with Bush on Thursday, Putin said there could be "no return" to Soviet-style government and that Russia was committed to democracy.

But he insisted that Moscow would develop democracy at its own pace and not let its society slip into anarchy and poverty.

The issue of the state of democracy in Russia was not brought up at Putin's

press conference with Gasparovic on Friday.

Putin and Bush, whose once warm relationship chilled when they broke over the war in Iraq, seemed closer at the summit on a range of international issues, agreeing that Iran and North Korea must not obtain nuclear weapons.

"It is important to neutralise the attempts to proliferate weapons of mass de-

struction," said Putin, who has rejected Washington's charges that Tehran seeks nuclear weapons under cover of a civilian atomic programme.

But a senior US administration official, briefing reporters on condition he not be named, acknowledged that the summit had yielded no breakthroughs on Iran, or on Russian weapons sales to Syria, which Washington wants halted. The official said Bush and Putin met alone with only interpreters in a separate room for over one hour of the two-and-a-half hour meeting.

Earlier Friday, Putin and Slovakian Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda honoured the Soviet troops who liberated Slovakia from the Nazis towards the end of World War II.

At his press conference, Putin referred to the Baltic states, which like Slovakia were freed from the Nazis only to be occupied by the Soviet communist regime, when he said that he respected "the feelings of those who in the Baltic countries see the end of the second world war as linked to the tragedy of their loss of independence."

Asked about the fact that Slovakia is now a close United States ally, Putin said: "It is important for us that Slovakia, which chose to join the European Union and Nato, also widen its relations in all areas with Russia." Bush left Bratislava on Thursday to return to Washington while the Russian leader left on Friday for Moscow.

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Iran, North Korea should not have nukes, say Bush and Putin

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BRATISLAVA (SLOVAKIA), FEB. 24. The United States President, George W. Bush, said today he had a "very important and constructive" dialogue with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, and that the two leaders agreed Iran and North Korea should not acquire nuclear weapons.

Mr. Putin reaffirmed his Government's commitment to democracy, but cautioned that reforms would have to take into account Russia's complicated history and its efforts to recover from decades of communism.

Disputes over democracy "must not be allowed to spoil" relations with Washington, Mr. Putin said.

In their meeting at a medieval castle perched on a hill overlooking the Danube River, the two leaders embraced new measures to combat nuclear terrorism and better safeguard atomic weapons arsenals, U.S. administration officials said.

"We agreed that Iran should not have a nuclear weapon. We agreed that North Korea should not have a nuclear weapon," Mr. Bush said as Mr. Putin stood by his side. He said he

and Mr. Putin discussed how "to continue to protect our people from attacks."

"I know the agony, I know the sadness, I know the emotion that comes with innocent people losing their lives," Mr. Bush said.

Mr. Putin said he and Mr. Bush "see no alternative to the constant strengthening of Russian-U.S. relations" and had in common the threat posed by nuclear weaponry in the wrong hands.

"We have common opinions, common approaches" on Iran and North Korea," Mr. Putin said in his first meeting with Mr. Bush since the U.S. President's inauguration for a second term.

Russia and the United States must "neutralise any attempts by terrorists to acquire weapons of mass destruction," Mr. Putin said.

He thanked Mr. Bush for accepting his invitation to attend the May 9 World War II victory celebrations in Moscow.

Mr. Bush said he appreciated the frank nature of his talks with Mr. Putin.

"You know what he says —

'yes' means yes and 'no' means no. Sometimes in politics, 'yes' means 'maybe,'" Mr. Bush said.

The U.S. leader said he confronted Mr. Putin on Russian backsliding in areas such as freedom of the press, and that the pair had an open discussion. Alluding to the sensitive nature of that part of their talks, Mr. Putin said Russia has made a final decision in favour of democracy, "and there can be no return."

But he added that democratic principles must fit Russia's history and present level of development.

"It must not lead to the collapse of the state and the impoverishment of the people," he said.

"Russia has made its choice in favour of democracy," Mr. Putin said. "This is our final choice and there is no way back, there can be no return to what we used to have. We are not going to make up, to invent any kind of special Russian democracy.

"We are going to commit to the fundamental principles that have been established in the world." — AP

25 FEB 2005

THE HINDU

25 FEB 2005

When two powers meet

By Alexander Kononov

W-Burma
HG-10 24/2 ✓

The Putin-Bush summit offers Russia an opportunity to reorder its relations with the West.

THE RUSSIA-United States summit in Bratislava, Slovakia, today (February 24) will not be a routine meeting between the two Presidents. The year 2004 was marked by significant changes in the approaches taken by the West, and the U.S. in particular, towards the political situation in Russia and Moscow's actions in the global arena. Therefore, the summit in Slovakia will certainly be a historical crossroads, and will determine future developments in many areas of international relations.

During Vladimir Putin's first presidential term, Russia managed to strengthen significantly its authority, role and weight in international affairs, which was a surprise for many experts. Importantly, these positive changes occurred against the backdrop of moderate economic success and progress in the reform of democratic institutions in the country. The positive image of Russia on the global arena was shaped by a well-considered and appropriate foreign policy; primarily, due to the fact that the Russian leader was one of the first foreign leaders to support the U.S. counter-terrorist operation in Afghanistan after 9/11.

Russia-European Union relations seem to have been developing quite successfully. The sides have agreed to create "four common spaces." At the end of 2003, prior to Mr. Putin's visit to the U.S., a doctrine on shaping a strategic alliance between Russia and the U.S. was even prepared, which saw strategic cooperation between the two great powers as the most realistic option for Russia's national interests.

However, the present state of relations between Russia and the West leaves little room for optimism. On the one hand, personal relations between Mr. Putin and George W. Bush and between the Russian President and other European leaders appear to remain friendly. On the other hand, U.S. and European media are inundated with material containing sharp criticism of Russia's domestic and foreign policy. In turn, the Russian press has also increased the amount of vociferous attacks on the

U.S. and the West in general.

Why have drastic changes in relations between Russia and the West happened? The external factors are obvious. The West has been sharply critical of Mr. Putin's reform of the political system launched after a series of terrorist acts culminating in the Beslan tragedy, Russia's attempts to interfere in presidential elections in Ukraine and Abkhazia, the Yukos case, and the lack of independent media in Russia.

In reality, many problems in relations and inappropriate actions have not occurred because of reciprocal enmity, but because professionals have failed to discuss and coordinate simple and routine issues in advance. Constant dialogue has been interrupted and there are few professionals to tackle the issues. If interests had been clarified in good time, many difficulties could have been avoided. One problem was the appearance of four NATO patrol aircraft in the Baltic states. It is well known that NATO countries share common airspace and patrol its entire perimeter. However, no one thought about discussing this problem while the Baltic states were in the process of joining NATO.

The world around Russia is quickly changing, and the country has long ceased to be "a fortress surrounded by enemies" that has to face the combined forces of the West. Despite what many Russian politicians and experts may think, the West and particularly the U.S. pay much less attention to Russia than they think and even less than it really deserves. Another widespread misconception in Russia is that the U.S. is making every possible effort to weaken and ultimately destroy the Russian state. We have to realise once and for all that the uncontrolled collapse of a large Eurasian power, which possesses thousands of nuclear warheads, would be catastrophic for America. Objectively, Russia is a key power safeguarding the security of the West,

and the U.S. in particular. Consequently, it is vital for Washington (although it has yet to understand this completely) that Russia remains strong economically and militarily, and politically stable.

All the recent conflicts in Russia-U.S. relations on post-Soviet space were related to the fact that both sides considered it a zone of rivalry rather than cooperation. Russia is very sensitive about everything that distances it from other CIS countries. However, if it genuinely aspires to be the centre of political and economic gravity across post-Soviet territory, then its main task is to offer to other CIS countries a more attractive model of development than those they can see in other neighbouring countries.

Russia is very concerned about the situation in Siberia and the Far East. There has been a great deal of speculation about those who would like to obtain the wealth of this region. However, once again, the major threat here is not from overseas, but within the country's borders. The demographic situation and the lack of a sensible migration policy have led to the possibility that Russia might ultimately be deprived of these riches, as it would simply have neither the manpower nor resources to explore and control them.

All the above-mentioned factors form a mandatory agenda for the Russian-U.S. dialogue. The current one that includes terrorism, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and energy dialogue is not enough. Naturally, acute problems such as the future of Iraq, relations with Iran, and the North Korean nuclear programme need to be discussed.

It is also important to determine the political sense of the current U.S. concept of struggling against the "outposts of tyranny," which has come to substitute the concept of countering the "axis of evil." It is more important, though, to go be-

yond the constraints of the electoral cycle in political thinking and answer a simple question: What do we want Russia-U.S. relations to be like in the near and distant future?

Russia must clearly define its national interests, primarily in relations with CIS countries, formulate these interests in a comprehensible manner and discuss the rules of conduct on post-Soviet territory with America. If interests are clearly defined and justified, they will be respected and Moscow will not have to clash with Washington in the Caucasus, Central Asia or Moldova.

The presidents should probably discuss how Russia sees the future of Siberia and the Far East.

The economic dialogue is a separate matter. It has to be an economic dialogue in the true sense of the phrase, one that includes not only energy resources, but also the entire spectrum of problems related to Russia's integration with the economies of the developed countries. Moreover, a comprehensive security dialogue needs to be revived with the U.S., considering all aspects of this notion, including security in the environment, demography, and border protection.

Russia must take the initiative. The U.S. can still afford to notice Russia's existence only when it has to deal with terrorist threats or the proliferation of nuclear weapons; so Moscow should be the first to produce initiatives. Today's agenda features the issue of a new world order, where Russia might occupy a prominent place or might be left in its remote corner.

Even in the current situation, some Western experts mention the possibility of transforming Great Russia into the Third West, not in terms of its importance, but as an addition to the existing two — the United States and the European Union. However, this scenario will be feasible only if both sides fulfil a number of requirements, one of which is to improve the quality of respective policies.

(The writer is President of the Russian Institute for Strategic Assessments, Moscow (for RIA Novosti).)

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Common Interests May Triumph At The Summit

By SERGEI KARAGANOV

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The world is waiting for the Bratislava summit between Vladimir Putin and George Bush with mixed feelings dominated by concern. There are objective and subjective reasons for this.

Russia-US relations have always been a combination of rivalry and cooperation. The traditional elite in the two countries have always regarded each other with suspicion, which was stronger in Russia in the past. The 9/11 tragedy and the personal friendship between the presidents had pushed back and suppressed rivalry.

Foreign policy

Another factor that kept us together was the similarity of our foreign policy philosophies: despite a difference of capabilities, it was a geo-political philosophy based on power, more conspicuously black and white than the European's philosophy. Both elite groups believed that realistic, sometimes cynical, interests prevailed over values. The common interests are to prevent nuclear proliferation, fight terror, preclude China from becoming a geo-political rival (of the US) and a threatening force if the geo-political vacuum deepens in the Russian Far East and East Siberia (for Russia).

There are serious differences between the two countries. For example, it is clear that the US and Russia have become rivals for influence in the former Soviet countries. Moscow was seriously pained by its "defeat" in Ukraine, which was largely a result of an ineffective policy.

The US elite, which is torn apart by contradictions, is developing a kind of consensus with regard to the events in Russia. It believes that Russia is sliding into authoritarianism, whose inefficiency can potentially weaken the country. This has again drawn attention to the safety of Russia's nuclear arsenals. The US elite is also criticising

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Russia's ineffective neo-imperialist policies in the CIS (but not the more effective American neo-imperialist campaign). Mr Bush tends to spotlight positive elements of interaction, but he is forced to react to the growing negative attitude of the press and expert commentaries.

Forces in Russia discuss losses in the CIS and suggest new mo-

no possibility of rapprochement with the EU in the next few years. Russia-EU relations are notable for mutual disillusionment and irritation.

So, a union with the EU, let alone against the US, is hardly probable. The situation will not be changed even by concessions in the area of "four spaces" that Russia is trying to develop



dels for anti-American alliances — with Europe, China, or India. This confrontation looks particularly attractive to the advocates of the isolationist policy (the North Korean "national capitalism"), whose ranks have swelled in Moscow.

Personal contacts

However, Russia has few possibilities to apply this foreign policy strategy. Mr Putin has relatively sound personal contacts with the heads of the leading EU countries — Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder, and Silvio Berlusconi (his relationship with Tony Blair have been seriously strained). But these politicians, yielding to the pressure of public opinion in their countries, have been forced, just like Mr Bush was, to gradually walk away from the Russian president.

The criticism of Moscow in the European media is at its sharpest since the Cold War. There is

jointly with the EU. Besides, Europe has been moving closer to the US on the platform of a common policy with regard to Russia.

Most experts say that the idea of creating a strategic bloc with China and India, which would counterbalance the USA and the EU, was stillborn. In conditions of India-China rivalry for leadership in Asia, Russia, which has a weaker economic and demographic potential, will be assigned the role of a junior, dependent partner in such a hypothetical alliance. Besides, New Delhi and Beijing would like to cooperate with the US and not with Russia, because they badly need investment, technologies and access to international markets. Russia cannot satisfy any of these requirements.

Beijing's policy is predictable for no more than a decade, while it modernises its economy and the army. Nobody knows how its

foreign policy would change after that. Beijing is relatively firmly connected with the US economically: the Chinese economy will collapse if six US major trade networks shut down. Besides, China may fail to survive the modernisation tensions and break up.

Hence, we can conclude that allied relations with Asian countries in terms of creating anti-Western axes and unions, would be ineffective for Russia. Likewise, the US would not benefit from a confrontation with Russia. Washington has few friends, let alone competent ones. And Russia, despite its relative weakness, holds the key geo-strategic position in the world because it "straddles" the Greater Middle East and borders on China.

Realpolitik

So, the cynical considerations of realpolitik will most probably take the upper hand in Bratislava. The presidents will exchange mutual complaints, decide that common interests are more important, and confirm the policy of cooperation in the spheres of common interests for the two countries and the rest of the world.

However, this policy will become increasingly vulnerable if political degradation and economic stagnation are not stopped in Russia. In this case, the advocates of unilateral actions and messianic democratic neo-imperialism will again take the upper hand in America. As a result, we will not find new promising areas for cooperation.

The stabilisation of Iraq is the most promising area of cooperation. Another such area is the creation of an international project Siberia, where joint construction of infrastructure, transport and industrial facilities in the Russian Far East and Siberia would turn back the process of de-capitalisation and depopulation of the region. This alarming process is creating a geo-economic vacuum that could eventually threaten not only Russia but international political stability in general.

Bush sermon slap to Russia

Brussels, Feb. 21 (Reuters): President George W. Bush took his strongest jab so far at the state of democracy and the rule of law in Russia today, three days before he is due to meet President Vladimir Putin.

In a speech appealing for European support for his global campaign for democracy, Bush referred to widespread concerns that Putin has chosen an increasingly authoritarian path.

"For Russia to make progress as a European nation, the Russian government must renew a commitment to democracy and the rule of law," he told an audience in Brussels, headquarters of the 25-nation EU and the Nato alliance.

While it would be wrong to isolate Russia, the US and European countries should "place democratic reform at the heart of their dialogue" with Moscow, Bush said.

"We recognise that reform will not happen overnight. We must always remind Russia, however, that our alliance stands for a free press, a vital opposition, the sharing of power and the rule of law," he said.

Western and Russian civil rights campaigners accuse Putin of restricting democracy by abolishing the election of provincial governors, pursuing a legal vendetta against the Yukos oil company and tightening the Kremlin's grip on the media. His comments set the scene for what could be a robust summit with Putin in the Slovakian capital of Bratislava on Thursday.

"The President's remarks on Russia, warning of the need to protect democratic values, were also stronger than anything he had previously said on the subject," said analyst Fraser Cameron of the European Policy Centre.

One Russian commentator said the Bush speech would likely annoy the Kremlin.

"I am afraid that may be met with some irritation on the Russian side as probably many Russian politicians are curious as to why... the nature of the domestic political regime should be the subject of international political discussions," said Boris Makarenko of the Centre for Political Technologies in Moscow.

Bush said Russia's future lay within the family of Eu-

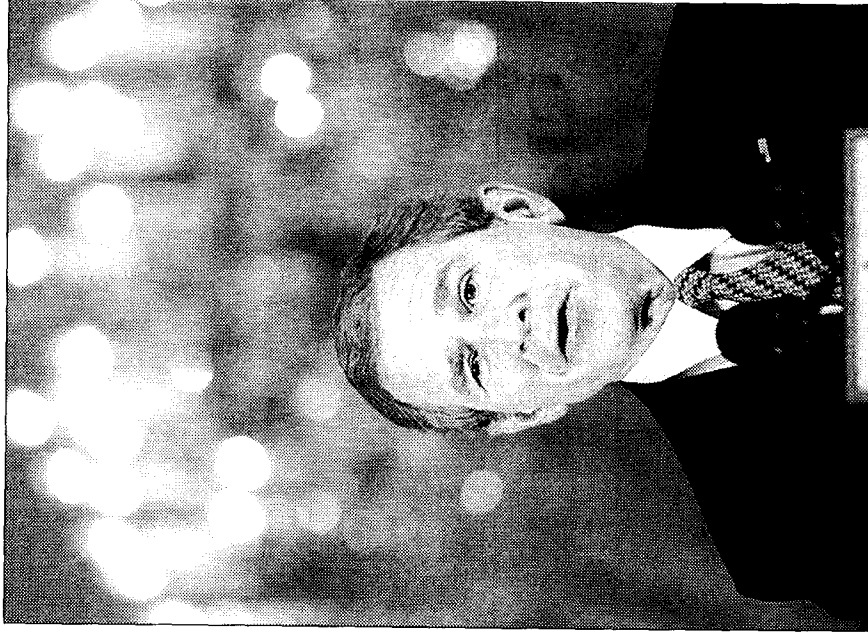
rope and the transatlantic community.

He added the US favoured World Trade Organisation membership for Russia — this year if possible — because meeting the Geneva-based body's standards would "strengthen the gains of freedom and prosperity in that country".

Russian analyst Masha Lipman of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said: "There seems to be a consensus in the administration that Russia is not on the right track at the moment as far as democracy is concerned, but as (secretary of state) Condoleezza Rice has said, the view is that disengaging from Russia is not the right move, hence the mention of WTO membership," she said.

Bush also urged Syria to end its occupation of Lebanon, branding Damascus an "oppressive neighbour" to a once-flourishing nation.

"Just as the Syrian regime must take stronger action to stop those who support violence and subversion in Iraq, Syria must also end its occupation of Lebanon," Bush said in the keynote speech.



President George W. Bush at the Concert Noble ballroom in Brussels. (AFP)