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## Clinton's visit further warms U.S.-India relations

by Matthew Rusling

WASHINGTON, July 25 (Xinhua) -- U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's visit to India earlier this month will set the stage for future relations with a nation now designated as a critical U.S. ally, experts say.

The July 18-20 visit underscores a shift toward integrating India more into the global economic community.

"It's an attempt to extend an olive branch," Malou Innocent, a foreign policy analyst at the Cato Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank, told Xinhua in a recent interview.

U.S. President Barack Obama views India as a rising power that will be crucial to addressing global issues, she said. And with the president's focus on concerns such as climate change and global financial crisis, the United States is eager to get India -- the world's largest democracy -- on board.

The most significant part of the trip was Clinton's invitation to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to visit the White House in November, experts said. That makes Singh the first foreign head of state to make such a high level visit under the Obama presidency.

But while many regard the move as an obvious next step, there are fears that Pakistan will view it as a snub, Innocent said.

During the Cold War, whenever the United States warmed to Pakistan, relations would cool with India and vice versa. And the fact that Clinton did not stop in Pakistan while visiting the region

-- her visit was aimed at highlighting the U.S. partnership with India -- may have also irked some Pakistani officials, she said.

Unfortunately, such a mentality is "somewhat intractable," she said. "The hostility between the two cannot be turned off like a light switch."

And given its booming economy and large population, India has unnerved some Pakistani defense officials, who feel encircled by India's rising influence, Innocent said.

"So we should be careful when we extend invitations to India not to rile the emotions and fears of Pakistan," she said, adding that the United States needs both countries to fight terrorism.

Reva Bhalla, director of analysis at Stratfor, a global intelligence company, said cozying up to the United States is in line with India's

strategic objectives.

"India is always looking for a shortcut to becoming a superpower and they want to raise their status and cement their position," she said.

But at the same time, the United States is trying to ease India's fears about Pakistan, according to Stratfor, as India blames its neighbor for supporting the militants who mounted an attack on Mumbai last year that left more than 100 civilians dead.

That means the United States will in the months ahead focus on India to prevent that country's friction with Pakistan from interfering with U. S. counter-insurgency strategy in the region, Stratfor said.

While in New Delhi, the United States reached a number of agreements with India. The two sides agreed to choose a pair of nuclear power plant sites for development by American firms.

The two leaders also signed an end-use monitoring agreement that would give the U. S. the right to ensure that American arms sold to India are used only for defense, and the technology is not to be resold or provided to third countries.

A five-year, 30 billion dollar deal will also allow U. S. contractors to help update India's Soviet-era aircraft and other military hardware.

Clinton also vowed not to prevent the transfer of nuclear technology to India.

But the United States will share no nuclear weapons technology, as U. S. law prohibits such exchanges, said Stephen Cohen, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, a Washington, D.C., think tank.

While Pakistan will eye the deal with suspicion, it still maintains a strong military relationship with the United States -- one that goes back to the Cold War -- and it receives U.S. funding for its armed forces, experts noted.

Bhalla said that while closer U.S. ties with India may irk Russia -- one of India's Cold War allies -- that country has a number of more pressing concerns.

Clinton also set up a so-called "strategic dialogue" with India's government in areas such as counter-terrorism, nonproliferation, technology, education, economics, science and climate change.

On climate change, Washington has pressed New Delhi to commit to a reduction in its greenhouse gas emissions as the Obama administration begins gathering support for a new global pact. But Indian officials publicly balked at U.S. pressure to come on board, signaling that the new relationship would have its share of spats.

But while the disagreement has grabbed headlines, it shouldn't derail relations, Bhalla said.

"India has always been opposed to carbon cuts," she said. "I wouldn't characterize it as a failure of Clinton's visit. They hit a lot of key points during the visit."

Lisa Curtis, a fellow at the Heritage Foundation, a Washington, D.C., think tank, said that overall the visit was a success, despite differences over carbon cuts.

"Those divisions were an irritant but Clinton didn't put all her eggs in that basket, which was wise," Curtis said.

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