

Obama says India is indispensable

US President Barack Obama Tuesday hailed India as an 'indispensable' partner as he rolled out the red carpet for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in the White House in the first official state visit of his presidency.

Chilly, damp weather forced the White House to move the ceremony indoors where Manmohan Singh and Obama stood before photographers and television cameras in the East Room as a Marine band played the national anthems of both countries.

Welcoming the prime minister and his wife Gursharan Kaur, Obama said: 'Mr. prime minister, yours is the first official visit of my presidency and it is fitting that you and India be so recognised.'

'This visit,' Obama said, 'reflects the high esteem in which I and American people hold for your wise leadership.'

'It reflects the abiding bonds, respect and friendship between our people, including our friends in the Indian American community who join us today,' Obama said.

India External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna, National Security Adviser M.K. Narayanan, Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao, Indian Ambassador to US Meera Shankar and corporate leaders like Ratan Tata, Chanda Kochhar of ICICI and Deepak Parekh of HDFC were among the delegates with the prime minister.

Obama said the visit at this 'pivotal moment in history speaks of opportunity before us to build the relationship between our nations born in the last century, into one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century'.

Citing the two countries' shared history of struggle against imperialism, Obama told Manmohan Singh: 'As the world's largest democracies, we can keep faith with our common values: speaking out and standing up for rights and dignity to which all human beings are entitled.'

He said India and the US shared the common story.

'This is the story of two people who struggled to break from the Empire and declared their independence, two bold experiments in democracy, two constituencies which begin with same simple words 'We The People', two great republics dedicated to the idea of liberty, justice, equality and the never ending work of perfecting their use.'

He said India's and US' story was of two 'economic marvels fuelled by hard work and innovation'.

'And today our nations are two global leaders driven not to dominate other nations but to build the future of security and prosperity for all nations. Mr prime minister, as we work to build that future, India is indispensable.'

Obama said: 'As leading economies US and India can strengthen global economic recovery in the world.'

Calling India a nuclear power and a co-partner in preventing the spread of the world's most deadly weapons and securing the loose nuclear material from terrorists, Obama said the two countries can pursue 'our shared vision of the world without nuclear weapons'.

He called India 'an increasingly a global influential power' and said: 'We can partner to meet other transnational challenges, developing clean energy, partnerships confronting climate change, stopping infectious diseases, reducing hunger and put an end to extreme poverty in our time.'

'This is the India that America welcomes today, a leader in Asia and around the world. These are the challenges we are summoned to meet in partnership,' Obama said.

He said India and the US having known the pain and anguish of terrorism 'can stand together, cooperate to prevent future attacks and promote the development and prosperity that undermines the hard extremists.'

Manmohan Singh shared the thought and said 'we should cooperate in addressing global challenges of combating terrorism, of making environment cleaner, and moving towards a world free of nuclear weapons.'

Singh said it is a 'moment of great opportunity' in our relations with the US which will help in meeting global challenges like terrorism.

The prime minister said he was 'deeply honoured' to be the first state guest of President Obama.

He said the two countries were separated by distance 'but (were) bound together by the values of democracy, pluralism, rule of law and respect of fundamental human feelings'.

The two countries have created a partnership 'based upon both principle and pragmatism', said Manmohan Singh.

'Our relations have been transformed and they encompass cooperation in all areas of human activity,' said Singh.

He thanked the president and his wife Michelle Obama for receiving him during the Thanksgiving week, which is a family holiday period here.

After making his statement, Obama escorted Singh out of the East Room for bilateral discussions.

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