

'Pakistan must cooperate' - Rice

Written by reporter

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The United States has told Pakistan it expects nothing short of complete cooperation in investigations into the terrorist rampage in nuclear rival India, and Pakistan's response will be a test of the will of the new civilian government, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said Monday.

"What we are emphasizing to the Pakistani government is the need to follow the evidence wherever it leads," Rice said. "I don't want to jump to any conclusions myself on this, but I do think that this is a time for complete, absolute, total transparency and cooperation and that's what we expect."

At President George W. Bush's direction, Rice is cutting short a European trip to visit India later this week. Attacks spanning three days killed more than 170 people in the Indian commercial capital Mumbai, including six Americans.

Indian leaders pointed fingers at "elements in Pakistan" although it is not yet clear where the well-planned operation originated.

"We share the grief and the anger of the Indian people but of course Americans were also killed in this attack and they were killed deliberately because they were Americans," Rice said during a press conference aboard her plane en route to London. "That makes this of special interest and concern to the United States."

Attackers chose sites representing the city's wealth and tourism, and reportedly sought out Westerners as victims. Rice will see Indian leaders in New Delhi. She does not plan to go to Mumbai.

A previously unknown Muslim group called Deccan Mujahideen — a name suggesting origins inside India — has claimed responsibility for the attacks. But Indian officials said the lone surviving gunman, now in custody, told authorities he belonged to a Pakistani militant group

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with links to the divided Himalayan territory of Kashmir.

India has blamed "elements" from Pakistan for the 60-hour siege during which suspected Muslim militants hit 10 sites across Mumbai. Pakistan denied it was involved and demanded evidence.

India has repeatedly accused Pakistan of complicity in terrorist attacks on its soil, many of which it traces to militant groups fighting Indian rule in Kashmir. The U.S. has tried to persuade Pakistan to shift its security focus from India, with which it has fought three wars, to Islamic militants along the Afghan border.

The Mumbai assaults raised fears among U.S officials of renewed violence between India and Pakistan. Both nations possess nuclear arms.

Rice said Pakistan's U.S-backed civilian president, Asif Ale Zardari, has pledged to improve relations.

Zardari replaced President Pervez Musharraf earlier this year and has established polite but distanced relations with Washington. Musharraf was a military man and a Bush administration ally against terrorism, but that closeness cost him support at home.

"It's a difficult task for this new Pakistani government," Rice said, referring to the way Islamabad will respond to the attacks next door. "They know this is a time to step up to the task."

Rice spoke Sunday with President-elect Barack Obama, their third conversation about India in as many days.

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Obama was expected to announce his pick to replace Rice as the top U.S diplomat later Monday. Democratic officials said Sunday that Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton would be named.

Rice is to go to India on Wednesday.

The White House announced Rice's trip Sunday, hours after Bush assured India's leader the U.S. government will put it's full weight behind the investigation.