

Republic Day parade centerpiece of Obama visit to India

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(Photo: Prakash Singh, AFP/Getty Images)

NEW DELHI — President Obama became the first American leader to be chief guest at India's grand Republic Day celebrations Monday, an honor that underscored the growing warmth between the two countries.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Obama watched the military displays, musicians and decorated camels from inside a protective glass enclosure.

Obama and first lady Michelle Obama received loud cheers as they took their places on the parade route at Rajpath, New Delhi's ceremonial boulevard. The parade was the highlight of Obama's three-day visit, focused on strengthening ties between the two countries after years of tension and mistrust.

Thousands came out despite the poor weather to see the festivities.

Obama and Modi cite nuclear investment breakthrough

(<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/01/25/obama-india-arrival/22307343/>)

Owing to security concerns, Obama's presence at the Republic Day celebrations — which mark the anniversary of India's constitution — was an unusual sign of trust and friendship. [Fullscreen](#)

"This is a very symbolically significant event — it's the biggest invitation India has to offer to a foreign head of state and in the past India has been wary of inviting the United States, given that the two countries have not always had the warmest of relationships," said Sanjay Kumar, a political scientist at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi.

Later Monday, Obama participated with Modi at a CEO roundtable and pledged \$4 billion in investments and loans to focus on the "untapped potential" of India.

"We are moving in the right direction," Obama told the business leaders.

India accounts for 2% of U.S. imports and 1% of its exports, Obama said. Annual trade between the countries is less than one-fifth of U.S. trade with China — valued at \$560 billion, he added.

Modi said U.S. investment in India had doubled over the past four months. He pledged to continue to implement the business-friendly reforms that were part of his successful election campaign in May.

"It will make it easy to do business," he said. "You will find a tax regime that is predictable and competitive. We have removed some of the excesses of the past. We will now address the remaining uncertainties."

A long-running complaint by Washington has been the slow pace of change in India regarding intellectual property protections, a consistent tax regime and an overly regulated business environment.

"There are still too many barriers and hoops to jump through — bureaucratic restrictions that make it hard to start a business, to export, to import, to close a deal," Obama said.

Obama ends his visit here Tuesday with a speech to India's youth. Then he flies to Saudi Arabia to pay respects to the royal family following the death of King Abdullah on Friday. A previously planned stop at the Taj Mahal was canceled to make time for the Saudi trip.

The warmth of the relationship between Obama and Modi — which was on display on Modi's September visit to the USA — has surprised many here. Until last year, Modi was banned from the USA for almost a decade over his alleged role in permitting the massacre of 2,000 Muslims when he was the governor of Gujarat state in western India in 2002. Obama lifted the ban after Modi took office.

When Obama arrived here Sunday, the two leaders hugged and Indian commentators noted personal contact between them throughout the visit.

Device found on White House grounds

(<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/01/26/device-found-white-house/22338121/>)

Still, the visit also produced substance, analysts say. Obama and Modi announced Sunday that they reached "a breakthrough understanding" in freeing up U.S. investment in nuclear energy development in India.

Picking up from a stalled 2008 civil nuclear agreement between the two countries, the deal would allow U.S. firms to invest in energy in India. It also resolves a dispute over U.S. insistence on tracking fissile material it supplies to the country and over Indian liability provisions that have discouraged U.S. firms from capitalizing on the agreement.

"From a distance, it does look like a huge breakthrough has been made on the nuclear liability bill — of course we still have to go through the details and understand what, if any, amendments are there, and what are the long-term implications of those," Kumar said.

Obama offers condolences over ISIL hostage

(<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/01/25/obama-condolences-hostage/22308765/>)

Obama and Modi also pledged to enhance the U.S. and India's cooperation on climate change and clean energy.

While the growing closeness between the two countries surprises some, N.R. Bhanumurthy, a professor at the National Institute of Public finance and Policy in New Delhi, said the friendship is a natural consequence of India's new role in the global economy.

"China's economy is witnessing a slight slowdown, other developed nations — except the U.S. — are still in a bad shape. We are witnessing a shift of short-term investors from China to India," Bhanumurthy said. "This has created a strong, robust market performance in India. Everybody, including the World Bank, now agrees that over the next two or three years, India is likely to record higher growth than China."

Still, some say they are happy Obama visited, but it will be a relief when the trip is over.

"It's been a tense few days and I am just happy it went off without anything happening," said N. Shah, a police officer on duty at the parade. "I am waiting for all this to be over. It will be nice to spend some time with my family."

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