

INTERVIEW-Vietnam urges Bush to build on Clinton's work.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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HANOI, May 29 (Reuters) - Vietnam urged President George Bush on Tuesday to build on Bill Clinton's work in normalising ties with Hanoi by sending a trade deal to Congress for ratification.

Vice Foreign Minister Chu Tuan Cap told Reuters the historic market-opening pact signed last July under the Clinton administration was in the interests of both countries.

"I hope President Bush would support the trade agreement," Cap said in an interview.

"We would like to expand our business with other countries and I think this goodwill of ours should be met correspondingly."

Vietnam said last week the future of the trade deal should not be linked to human rights issues and that any attempt to renegotiate it would be "inappropriate and unsatisfactory."

James Kelly, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Asian and Pacific Affairs, said in Hanoi earlier this month the arrest of dissident Roman Catholic priest Nguyen Van Ly would not help the trade pact's approval process.

Analysts say ratification of the deal could almost double Vietnam's annual exports to the United States to more than \$1 billion within one or two years from about \$600 million in 2000.

Cap praised Clinton's role in normalising ties.

"President Clinton did a lot, including the establishment of an embassy and the signing of the trade agreement," he said.

"Both sides should continue this process."

WAIT AND SEE

Asked about Bush's policy towards Vietnam, Cap said: "It's too early to say if President Bush's policy towards Vietnam would be different. We will have to wait and see."

The local and foreign business lobby in Vietnam has been hoping that the Bush administration would send the trade pact to Congress for ratification next week.

However, doubts resurfaced on Friday when key Republican Congressman Phil Crane said he was aiming to bring legislation to the House of Representatives in June that would give Bush broad trade negotiating authority.

Supporters of the Vietnam agreement fear tabling of such legislation before the bilateral pact could lead to a long delay in ratification.

Crane, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee's trade subcommittee, had previously spoken in favour of separate treatment for Vietnam.

Asked if he was optimistic about ratification, Cap replied: "By nature, we are never pessimistic, even during wartime when there were bombs...so logically speaking this agreement should be approved."

(With additional reporting by David Brunnstrom).

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