

China against Obama-Dalai Lama meet

Any meeting between President Barack Obama and the Dalai Lama would harm bilateral relations, China warned yesterday while repeating Beijing's refusal to discuss Tibet's status with the spiritual leader's envoys.

An Obama meeting with the Tibetan spiritual leader would "seriously undermine the political foundation of Sino-US relations," said Zhu Weiqun, executive deputy head of the Communist Party's United Front Work Department in charge of recent talks with the Dalai Lama's representatives.

Zhu was speaking at a news conference where he said Chinese officials told the envoys that Beijing would not make any compromises on its sovereignty over the Himalayan region and that both sides' views remained "sharply divided."

The warning to Obama comes after signals from US officials in recent weeks that Obama might soon meet the exiled Tibetan leader something Chinese officials are keen to avoid before President Hu Jintao travels to Washington, possibly in April.

Zhu said any arguments that the Dalai Lama was just a religious figure were wrong, calling the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize laureate the "head of a separatist group."

No date for Obama's meeting with the Dalai Lama has been announced, but White House spokesman Mike Hammer said last month that "the President has made clear to the Chinese government that we intend to meet with the Dalai Lama, it has been his every intention." The White House did not immediately return a call seeking comment Monday night.

Bilateral relations have already been strained by the US announcement Friday that it planned to sell \$6.4 billion worth of arms to Taiwan.

Beijing quickly suspended military exchanges with Washington and announced an unprecedented threat of sanctions against the US companies involved in the sale.

Zhu did not give any details on what China would do if Obama meets the Dalai Lama. "We will take corresponding measures to make the relevant countries realize their mistakes."

Representatives of the United Front met over the weekend with two emissaries of the Dalai Lama for their first talks in 15 months, but Zhu said China would discuss only the future of the exiled spiritual leader, not any greater autonomy for Tibet.

"There is no room for negotiation or concession on the part of the central government on these issues," Zhu said.

At the last talks in 2008, China rejected a proposal presented by the Dalai Lama's envoys for a way for Tibetans to achieve more autonomy under the Chinese constitution, a key demand of the minority community.

Meet the Dalai Lama

Recent high-profile meetings



- May 2009**
Meets Danish Prime Minister Lars Loekke Rasmussen in a private visit near Copenhagen
- December 2008**
Meets French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Poland while Sarkozy was holding EU's presidency. China retaliated by scrapping a China-EU summit in France
- May 2008**
British PM Gordon Brown in London. The meeting was not held in Brown's Downing Street Office
- October 2007**
US President George W. Bush at a ceremony presenting the Dalai Lama with the Congressional Gold Medal

AFP 020210

Iran blasts US missile plan for Gulf

Iran yesterday criticized the US move to boost the defensive missile system in Gulf Arab countries against potential strikes by Tehran, calling it a political ploy to increase American military presence in the region.

Parliament speaker Ali Larijani said upgrading the missile defence systems in the Persian Gulf would only bring more trouble for US forces.

"Regional countries should know that this puppet show by the US, while claiming to create security in the region is nothing except a new political ploy to increase the (American) military presence at the expense of others," Larijani said during a parliament session.

The remarks follow reports that the Obama administration has quietly increased the capability of land-based Patriot defensive missiles in several Gulf Arab nations. One US military official said last week the Navy is stepping up the presence of ships capable of knocking out hostile missiles in flight.

The defences are being beefed up ahead of possible new sanctions against Tehran over its refusal to halt uranium enrichment, which the West fears masks Iranian ambitions to produce a nuclear weapon.

Iran has missiles ranging up to 1250 miles that could hit Israel and the US bases in the region. Tehran denies its nuclear program is meant for any other purpose except electricity production.

Four Mideast countries to have the US system are Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain which also hosts the US Navy's 5th Fleet headquarters and Qatar, which has a modernized US air operations centre that played a key role in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Gen David Petraeus, the US Central Command chief responsible for US military operations across the Middle East, mentioned in recent public speeches one element of the defensive strategy in the Gulf: upgrading Patriot missile systems, which originally were deployed in the region to shoot down aircraft but now can hit missiles in flight.

In remarks at Georgetown Law School on Jan 21, Petraeus said the US now has eight Patriot missile batteries stationed in the Gulf region two each in four countries.

Larijani warned Mideast nations not to be "deceived by US anti-Iran policies" and talk of a growing Iranian threat.

"When, in the past 31 years, has Iran attacked any of its neighbouring states or any other countries in the region," Larijani asked, adding the 1980-88 war with Iraq was in defence against the attack launched by Saddam Hussein.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast also addressed the Gulf defensive missiles plan, telling reporters Iran considers it to be "ineffective." He said it would not affect what he described as Iran's close ties with regional countries.

The American move in the Persian Gulf is part of a broader adjustment in the US approach to missile defence, including in Europe and Asia, and has been in the works for months. Details have not been publicly announced, in part because of diplomatic sensitivities in Gulf countries, which worry about Iranian military capabilities but are cautious about acknowledging US protection.

Mehmanparast, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman, also denied this week's claims by Thailand that a plane load of North Korean weapons seized there in December was headed to Iran.

"There is no link between the aircraft and our country," Mehmanparast said.

He said Iran had no need to import such arms due to its own weapons production, which includes rockets, tanks, jet fighters, light submarines and missiles.

Egypt welcomes Hamas readiness for unity with Fatah

Egypt yesterday welcomed statements by Hamas leaders that they were ready to seal a unity deal with the rival Fatah faction but said Cairo's blueprint for Palestinian reconciliation was not up for negotiations.

"Successive statements from several Hamas leaders regarding their willingness to achieve Palestinian reconciliation are welcome," foreign ministry spokesman Hossam Zaki said.

But he ruled out requests by Hamas to modify an Egyptian-drafted document to seal the reconciliation between the Islamist group and Fatah, the mainly secular party of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

"This matter would delay reconciliation indefinitely," Zaki said in a statement.

"Opening the way for any changes in the document would mean... a regression," Zaki said, in apparent reference to repeated reservations by Hamas over the Egyptian proposals.

Egypt's efforts to re-unite the two rival factions have so far failed and Cairo has postponed twice a planned signing of a reconciliation agreement because of the deep divisions between Hamas and Fatah.

During the last attempt in October Hamas refused to sign the Egyptian-brokered document aimed at paving the way for legislative and presidential elections. Fatah signed the document.

Zaki said reservations from Hamas or any other faction would be taken into account when implementing the agreement.

His remarks came after Hamas' exiled leader Khaled Meshal said on the weekend that his group was willing to reconcile with Fatah if invited to Cairo.

US ADOPTION ROW IN HAITI

33 infants' parents 'reclaim' their children

The 33 infants and children that an American Christian group tried to smuggle out of quake-hit Haiti are being reunited with their families, the US-based aid group now caring for them said yesterday.

The children were picked up last week by members of an Idaho-based Baptist group called New Life Children's Refuge who tried to take them across the border to the Dominican Republic where they planned to establish an orphanage.

But some of the children are not orphans at all.

"The parents now are coming to the village to reclaim their children," Heather Paul, the CEO of SOS Children's Villages USA, told NBC's "Today Show". "We already hear that many are saying that we have seized."

Police seized five men and five women with US passports, as well as two Haitians, as they tried late Friday to cross into the neighbouring Dominican Republic with the children aged between two months and 14 years.

The case came to light as authorities in the capital Port-au-Prince expressed concern that some Haitian children may have fallen prey to human traffickers or been misidentified as orphans.

Paul said the children had been in poor condition when her group first received them but that they appeared to be on the mend.

"They came quite traumatized, as you can imagine, for a number of reasons. First, the devastation of the earthquake and then the mystery or confusion of their family's disappearance."

"They're getting better," she said.

Paul added that while in the care of the US Baptist group, the children, "weren't well dressed, they were dehydrated. They needed medical assistance."

She said the case underscored the need for stricter rules and greater vigilance in dealing with children in Haiti.

"I don't know all the facts, but if they were good intentions, they've certainly gone away," she said.

"I think this is proof positive for all those people around the world who would like to adopt Haitian children, that we must wait on the right registration."

Laura Silsby, head of New Life Children's Refuge, has insisted the group's aims were entirely altruistic.

"We came here literally to just help the children. Our intentions were good," she told AFP from police detention. "We wanted to help those who lost parents in the quake or were abandoned."

In Port-au-Prince, interim prosecutor Mazar Fortil said the Christians may face a charge of criminal conspiracy in Haiti as well as possible charges of kidnapping minors and child-trafficking.

4 Nato soldiers killed in Afghanistan

Four Nato soldiers have been killed in bomb attacks in Afghanistan, defence officials say.

Two bombs killed two British personnel who were on foot patrol in the southern province of Helmand.

An American serviceman died in a roadside bombing elsewhere in the south, officials said.

A Colombian, serving in the Spanish army, died when his armoured vehicle was blown up while escorting an aid convoy to the west of Kabul.

Attacks by militants in Afghanistan have killed more than 15 US soldiers in 2010.

At least 100,000 foreign military personnel are deployed in Afghanistan under Nato and US command. Of these, at least 74,000 are American.

President Barack Obama has announced that an additional 30,000 US troops will be deployed quickly in Afghanistan to fight the insurgency.



Spanish soldiers carry the coffin of Jon Felipe Romero Meneses at the Spanish military base in Herat, western Afghanistan, on Tuesday. The Spanish military base in Herat came under rocket attack hours before the arrival of Spanish Defence Minister Carme Chacon, who arrived at the base to oversee the return home of Meneses' body. Meneses was killed and six other soldiers were injured, when the armoured vehicle they were travelling in, struck a powerful mine in Badghis province on February 01, 2010.

Mexico drug gangs kill 46 in three days

A spasm of bloodletting by drug gangs claimed at least 46 lives over a long weekend in Mexico, including at least 16 young people gunned down at a high school party, officials said.

The grim trail of death began early Sunday in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico's murder capital, when gunmen drove up to the house in several cars, first shooting at people gathered outside, then chasing and cornering some of the partygoers who jumped over a fence frantically running for their lives.

Most of the 16 or more victims were youths, according to José Reyes, mayor of the city of 1.3 million inhabitants just across the border from El Paso, Texas.

Enrique Torres, a military spokesman, said the gunmen had apparently been looking for someone who was not even at the party, which was to celebrate a birthday and a local soccer team championship. Not finding the individual,

Republican, Democrat hopefuls target Obama Senate seat

Republican and Democratic hopefuls will duke it out in a primary election yesterday for the chance to win a potent symbolic prize: President Barack Obama's former US Senate seat.

Obama's home state of Illinois is holding this year's first primary, where the party faithful make their picks for November's mid-term elections.

The Senate contest is expected to be shaped by forces -- a sour economy, an anti-incumbent mood and doubts about Obama among independent voters -- that spell trouble for Democrats.

And Republicans hoping to harness voter anger and ride to victory in November could deal a devastating blow to their rivals should they capture Obama's coveted seat.

In a normal election year, Republicans would have slim chances of winning in the Democrat-leaning Midwestern state where Obama romped to a 62-38 percent victory in his 2008 rout of Republican White House rival John McCain.

"The Democrats should be in a position, here in Illinois, where they survive a national trend going towards the Republican party," said DePaul University political science professor Michael Mezey.

President Zuma criticised over love child report

A South African presidential spokesman yesterday called a newspaper story that the country's polygamist leader had fathered a child out of wedlock "a private, personal issue" without confirming or denying the report.

Some political opponents already have criticized President Jacob Zuma, who has three wives and is engaged to a fourth woman, saying his alleged actions send the wrong message in a country where one-tenth of the population is living with the virus that causes AIDS.

BCL men stop admission

authority concerned.

The release also said some miscreants in guise of students put obstruction in the admission process of the honours first year of 2009-2010 academic session, stopped admission seekers and vandalised some rooms of the college and assault some teachers.

The meeting endorsed a condemnation proposal for the incident and demanded legal actions against the miscreants.

Our Sathkha correspondent adds: At least six to eight BCL men confined teachers of Sathkha City College for 15 minutes to a room where they were taking interview of the admission seekers.

The interview process resumed after half an hour as college unit BCL General Secretary Aminur Rahman rushed in and unlocked the room.

BCL has been demanding a "political quota" in the admission to the college for the last few days.

Our Kushtia correspondent adds: The interview of first year honours admission seekers resumed at Kushtia Government College at 9:00am yesterday after the Chhatra League men halted it on Monday.

Principal of the college Professor Hasanuzzaman said yesterday's interview of the admission seekers was taken following due process.

On Monday, BCL men along with some outsiders led by BCL college unit General Secretary Al-Mamun entered the principal's room and asked him to keep a quota of at least 100 seats in the admission.

They also locked up rooms of several departments and the accounts section to stop sale of admission forms when the principal refused to meet their demand.

Constitution lost basic character

FROM PAGE 1

policy, destroyed the secular character of the constitution, allowed politics based on religion, and provided political rights to the anti-Liberation War forces and war criminals.

Besides, Bangalee nationalism was replaced by Bangladeshi nationalism through the fifth amendment passed during the regime of military ruler Ziaur Rahman.

According to the 2005 High Court verdict, the amendment undermined the very sovereign character of the republic.

Article 1 of the constitution says Bangladesh is a unitary, independent, sovereign republic to be known as the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Interpreting the article, former chief justice Mustafa Kamal says in his book "Bangladesh Constitution: Trends and Issues", "Article 1 distinguishes Bangladesh from a dependency or a colony or a federating unit. Bangladesh has opted for a republican form of government. So, any kind of monarchy, oligarchy, aristocracy or dictatorship is an anathema to its republican character."

In the case centring the eighth amendment, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed said sovereignty belongs to the people, and supremacy of the constitution as the solemn expression of the will of the people, democracy, republicanism, unitary state, separation of powers, independence of judiciary and fundamental rights are basic structures of the constitution.

"These are the structural pillars of the constitution and they stand beyond any change by amendatory process," he observed.

Trial of war criminals stopped and their political rehabilitation began with the scrapping of the Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunal) Order 1972 by Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed, who assumed presidency and put the country under martial law.

By the second proclamation order on May 3, 1976, Justice AM Sayem, who became the president later, omitted the proviso to article 38 of the constitution, which barred politics based on religion.

In light of the proviso, the Special Powers Act provides provisions for punishment against usage of religion for political purpose.

But omission of the provision radically altered the character of political activities in the country with the rise of religion-based political parties, which had been constitutionally banned immediately after the country's independence for their anti-Liberation War role.

The constitutional bar on war criminals convicted under Bangladesh Collaborators (Special Tribunal) Order 1972 from becoming voters and contesting in parliamentary elections was also lifted during the regime of Zia who restored multi-party democracy under the cover of martial law.

Grabbing state power, General HM Ershad later made Islam the state religion by amending the constitution.

The first martial law lastly led by Major General Ziaur Rahman brought some fundamental changes to the constitution by a proclamation order on April 23, 1977.

The preamble to the constitution was preceded by "Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim" (in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful).

The preamble also underwent two changes--the words "a historic struggle for national liberation" were replaced with "a historic war for national independence", and "nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism" as the "high ideals" in the second paragraph was replaced with "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice".

Analogous changes were made in the fundamental principles of state policy "to bring them in conformity with the changed preamble", observes Justice Mustafa Kamal in his book.

Article 8 of the original constitution, which speaks of the four fundamental principles of state policy--nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism, was amended to omit secularism and insert the words "absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah".

The principle of socialism was also given a new explanation, saying "socialism would mean economic and social justice".

Bangalee nationalism and socialism and freedom from exploitation in articles 9 and 10 were substituted by the concepts of promotion of local government institutions and participation of women in national life.

The amendment totally omitted article 12, which contained secularism and freedom of religion.

"These changes were of fundamental in nature and changed the very basis of our war for liberation and also defaced the constitution altogether," the High Court observed in its verdict, which, it said, transformed secular Bangladesh into a "theocratic state" and "betrayed one of the dominant causes for the war of liberation of Bangladesh".