

RARE CHINA TRIP

Blinken to seek to ‘responsibly manage’ ties

AFP, Washington

Secretary of State Antony Blinken will seek to reduce the chances of miscalculation on a rare visit to Beijing, officials said, but both sides expect long-term tensions to fester.

The State Department confirmed that Blinken will travel this weekend to Beijing on the first trip by a top US diplomat in nearly five years, rescheduling a visit that was scrapped in February as the United States detected what it said was a Chinese spy balloon.

Ahead of the trip, Blinken spoke by telephone to Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang and stressed “the importance of maintaining open lines of communication to responsibly manage” the relationship, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said.

Relations between the world’s two largest economies have tanked in recent years over Taiwan, trade and human rights, among a litany of other issues.

Daniel Kritenbrink, the top State Department official for East Asia, said that the United States was “realistic” about what Blinken could achieve.

“We’re not going to Beijing with the intent of having some sort of breakthrough

or transformation,” Kritenbrink told reporters.

Instead, Blinken is coming with a “sincere desire to manage our competition in the most responsible way possible.”

The United States hopes the trip “will, at a minimum, reduce the risk of miscalculation so that we do not veer into potential conflict.”

US policymakers across party lines have spoken of China as the foremost US competitor, even as President Joe Biden also focuses on countering Russia over Ukraine invasion.

“We know efforts to shape or reform China over several decades have failed,” said Kurt Campbell, who leads Asia policy at the White House.

“We expect China to be around -- to be a major player -- on the world stage for the rest of our lifetimes,” he told reporters.

Campbell said the United States also expected more “provocative steps” by China over Taiwan, the self-governing democracy claimed by Beijing.

China has accused the United States of stirring up trouble in Taiwan through arms sales and visits by senior lawmakers -- allegations rejected by Washington, which says it seeks to preserve the status quo by helping Taipei defend itself.



Migrants arrive at the port of Kalamata, following a rescue operation, after their boat capsized at open sea, in Kalamata, Greece yesterday. At least 79 migrants drowned early yesterday and more were feared missing after their overloaded boat capsized and sank off Greece, in one of Europe’s deadliest shipwrecks this year.

PHOTO: REUTERS

India, Pakistan brace for cyclone today
More than 100,000 people evacuated

REUTERS, Mumbai

Roads will be inundated along parts of India’s western coast and thatched houses were likely to be destroyed, the country’s weather department said yesterday, a day before a fierce cyclone was expected to make landfall in Gujarat and southern parts of Pakistan.

More than 100,000 people in India and Pakistan have been evacuated from the path of the cyclone.

Classified as a very severe cyclonic storm, Biparjoy was situated about 280 km (174 miles) from Jakhau Port in Gujarat and was expected to make landfall around this evening.

“It will touch Kutch Saurashtra coast (in Gujarat) adjoining the Pakistan coast between Mandvi and Karachi and near Jakhau port on June 15 from 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm in India (1030-1430 GMT),” Manorama Mohanty, the Gujarat director of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), told reporters.

“As of now, our forecast is it will cross as a very severe cyclonic storm. After crossing, its intensity will fall and become a cyclonic storm and depression.”

Meteorologists said the cyclone packed winds with maximum sustained speeds of 125-135 km (78-84 miles) per hour, gusting up to 150 km (93 miles) per hour.

US pushing India to seal big armed drone buy for Modi visit

Sources say Indian PM, Biden are also expected to discuss co-production of munitions while Modi is in Washington

REUTERS, Washington/New Delhi

Ahead of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s state visit to Washington, the Biden administration is pushing New Delhi to cut through its own red tape and advance a deal for dozens of US-made armed drones, two people familiar with the matter said.

India has long expressed interest in buying large armed drones from the United States. But bureaucratic stumbling blocks have hampered a hoped-for deal for SeaGuardian drones that could be worth \$2 billion to \$3 billion for years.

US negotiators are counting on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s White House visit on June 22 to break the log jam.

Since the date for Modi’s visit was fixed, the US State Department, Pentagon and White House have asked India to be able to “show” progress on the deal for as many as 30 armable MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones made by General Atomics, two sources said.

Modi and Biden are also expected to discuss co-production of munitions and ground vehicles, like armored personnel carriers, while Modi is in Washington, the sources said.

Spokespeople for the White House, Department of State and the Pentagon declined to comment on the negotiations.

US President Joe Biden has made deepening ties with India a cornerstone of his policy to counter China’s growing

influence, placing special attention this year on collaboration between the world’s two largest democracies on advanced military technologies, despite their lack of a formal security alliance.

New Delhi, which often prizes its non-alignment in conflicts between great powers abroad, has frustrated Washington by maintaining some defense and economic ties with Russia after the invasion of Ukraine.



Breaking India’s bureaucratic log jam on drones hinges on an internal meeting to generate an “Acceptance of Necessity” document, an Indian precursor to a formal “Letter of Request” which kicks off the foreign military sale process. As of Tuesday, the sources did not know if the New Delhi had generated the necessary internal document.

“That’s gonna be a decision that the government of India needs to make,” said

a senior Biden administration official. “We think it would be good for them to go through with the purchase of MQ-9s. But those decisions are sort of more in the hands of India than they are of us.”

The topic was expected to be on the agenda as Biden’s national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, arrived in New Delhi on Tuesday to finalize preparations ahead of Modi’s visit.

As of last week, India’s defense ministry had still not made up its mind about the number of drones it wants to buy, according to a person familiar with the discussions. Earlier, the number was pegged at 30, but that was later revised to 24, and then further down to 18 last month. Sources cautioned that none of the numbers were final.

India is also seeking components of the equipment to be domestically manufactured, something that could complicate any deal.

The Quad grouping of countries - the United States, India, Australia and Japan - all operate, or have operated, the MQ-9B SeaGuardian. Currently, India is leasing MQ-9Bs as part of an intelligence-gathering operation.

India’s chequered track record with Muslim minorities, political opposition and independent journalism under Modi is unlikely to feature on the agenda when Biden hosts the Indian leader to Washington next week, according to observers of US-India relations.

Russian strikes kill 6 in Ukraine
Kyiv reports small advances

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russian missile attacks killed three people in the Black Sea city of Odesa and three in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine yesterday, as Kyiv reported small advances in its counteroffensive against Russian forces. The three killed in Odesa were in a retail chain warehouse that was set ablaze during an attack that damaged a business centre, an educational institution, a residential complex, food establishments and shops, Ukraine’s military said. Video and photographs posted online by a local official showed multi-storey buildings with parts of their walls missing and windows blown out, and firefighters battling flames in what appeared be a warehouse.

FUTURE AI RULES
EU lawmakers approve plan

AFP, Strasbourg

EU lawmakers yesterday voted to adopt a key text forming the basis of a future law regulating artificial intelligence systems like ChatGPT, while aiming to foster innovation in the technology. Negotiations on the final law were set to begin later yesterday between the European Parliament and the EU’s 27 member countries. If Brussels hits its ambitious target of reaching an agreement by the end of the year, it would be the world’s first law regulating AI. Although the EU’s plans date back to 2021, the draft rules took on greater urgency when ChatGPT exploded onto the scene last year.

Dogged by irregularities

FROM PAGE 1

The letter said teacher of the department Prof Zia Rahman took only three online classes in nine months of the first semester for master’s degree.

Teachers are required by rules to give two 90-minute lectures and hold a 60-minute discussion or tutorial class every week and no more than 40 percent of the classes can be online.

Prof Zia imparted the three lessons on a course that is similar but different to the one the students were studying, read the letter, which this paper has a copy of.

It said the students realised this error when they tried to register for the exams and were told by officials that they don’t have the course.

“We contacted the department immediately,” said a student.

Prof Zia, also the dean of the social sciences faculty, had to hold several classes over a month to finish teaching the course. This delayed the exams by a month, said students.

The letter alleged that Prof Zia and Associate Prof Khandaker Farzana Rahman do not publish sessional results on time, which they are required to do within two weeks of an exam.

Sessional results are scores on students’ attendance, mid-term exams, assignments, and presentations.

It said department Chairman Associate Prof Shaharia Afrin held most classes online and Assistant Prof ABM Najmus Sakib indulged in favouritism in giving grades.

Four 4th year students on December 26 wrote to the VC and pro-VC asking that their answer scripts for the 7th semester final exams be re-evaluated by an independent exam committee.

The students -- Sakin Tanvir, Mehbeez Binte Matiur, Shozayet Ahmed Bhuiyan, and Tahnan Mahjabin Adhora -- wrote the letter after learning that they got poor scores on a course taught by Prof Zia.

On January 18, they also learnt that they got 2 out of 20 on a mid-term test on Prof Zia’s course.

The four wrote to the pro-VC and VC again on June 1 demanding the same.

Pro-VC Prof Maksud said, “After receiving the letters, I asked the authorities concerned [exam controller] to take steps. I cannot take action regarding the other letter as it was anonymous.”

He said the exam controller’s office told him that it would not be possible due to technicalities.

Two of the four students filed a writ with the HC seeking the halt of the provisional certificate issuance for their batch and an order for the university to probe within two months.

An HC bench has issued a rule in their favour.

Pro-VC Maksud said he learnt that some teachers in the department do not publish mid-term results on time and submit answer scripts two to three months after the deadline.

After the teachers learnt about the anonymous letter and the demand for re-evaluation of answer scripts, they held a meeting with students on January 19.

A group of the students afterwards wrote to the department chairman demanding the writers of the anonymous letter be identified and punished.

At an academic committee meeting of the department on January 25, two committees were formed with four teachers. The anonymous letter had complaints against three of the members.

One committee summoned the four students on February 7 and at least two of the students alleged that the probe body threatened to take action against them bringing allegations of plagiarism. “We are now worried

about our future,” said a student, seeking anonymity.

Shozayet Ahmed Bhuiyan said, “If they [the university] had the will to re-evaluate the scripts, they would have investigated the issue and taken action. But instead of doing so, we are being harassed by the department committee.”

TEACHERS’ SAY
On not taking classes, Prof Zia told this newspaper, “This is an utter lie. The so-called allegations you are referring to are based on a fake letter that was issued with no names nor signatures.”

In his written reply, he said he did not teach students the wrong course. “I was given responsibility for two courses; one in the first semester and the other in the second. There was just an issue of beginning the 2nd course first but the minute I was informed that it had to be the other course, classes were taken accordingly.”

“My students were extremely cooperative about this as well. Both courses were completed on time, and the students did well in both too.”

Prof Zia said the four students got the marks according to their performance and that the same four had got nine out of 10 in another assessment. He pointed out that

roughly 20 other students performed poorly in the exam but the others made no complaints.

Someone provoked them to file the complaint, he said, adding, “This is the dirty reality of university politics and this is perhaps what happens when teachers use students to attack their own colleagues.”

Talking about students’ allegations of intimidation, Chairman of the department Shaharia and Associate Professor Najmus said they did not have any intention to threaten students.

“It is really a problem if the discussion is presented before you in a fabricated way,” Shaharia said.

She said their committee could not find out who sent the anonymous letter. Asked about re-evaluation of the exam results, she said, “As they went to higher authorities, the department cannot say anything about it.”

Asked about allegations of taking more classes online than allowed, she said she took the online classes following university rules and after consultations with students.

Najmus refuted allegations of favouritism against him.

Former chairman of the department Farzana admitted that she had

on occasion missed the deadlines for publishing sessional results and said many other teachers of the university miss the deadlines.

DU Vice-Chancellor Prof Akhtaruzzaman said he did not know about the committees formed by the criminology department. Asked if students could reach out to him bypassing course teachers, the department chairman, and student advisers, he said students who have grievances can reach out to the VC.

When told that the department formed a committee to probe why the students bypassed the department and went to the VC and pro-VC, Prof Akhtaruzzaman said, “Such acts [forming the committees] are unacceptable.

“It is very unusual to consider such complaints of students as a crime. We are here to ensure justice. Students have nothing to fear,” he added.

Pro-VC Maksud said, “All decisions of departments and the university should be student-friendly. If any students become frightened about any decision of the authorities, it is tantamount to harassment of the students.”

Help ensure free, fair polls

FROM PAGE 1

Clear and repeated statements and actions by US officials can help ensure that the Bangladeshi government complies with its human rights obligations, said the Congress members.

“This is especially important in preparation for the upcoming elections, as there have already been mass arrests and violence against opposition parties which could tarnish the results and deepen social conflict.”

The six -- William R Keating, James P McGovern, Barbara Lee, Jim Costa, Dina Titus and Jamie Raskin -- wrote the letter on June 8 and Keating posted the letter in his official Twitter handle.

They welcomed the US visa restrictions and sanctions against the Rab and seven of its current and former officials. “Unfortunately, despite these actions, repression in Bangladesh has not ceased.”

The December 2021 US sanctions empowered many in Bangladeshi society to speak out about the human rights violations they have witnessed, documented, or experienced at the hands of various law enforcement agencies, the letter reads.

In response, the Bangladeshi government has intensified reprisals

against civil society organisations, human rights defenders, victims of human rights violations, and their families.”

They also said they understand that Bangladesh is an important US partner and appreciate its willingness to host around one million Rohingya refugee. “At the same time, the decision not to invite Bangladesh to the 2023 Summit of Democracy was a clear signal that the State Department recognises the country’s democratic and human rights challenges ahead of scheduled 2024 elections.”

Earlier, six other US congressmen wrote to US President Joe Biden, calling for urgent actions to stop the “human rights abuses” by the Bangladesh government and give the people of Bangladesh the best possible chance for free and fair parliamentary elections.

The six congressmen are Scott Perry, Barry Moore, Warren Davidson, Bob Good, Tim Burchett and Keith Self.

On June 12, six members of the European Parliament asked the EU High Representative Joseph Borrell to contribute to ensuring free, fair, and impartial general elections in Bangladesh, “possibly under a poll-time neutral caretaker government”.