

Obama postpones meeting the Dalai Lama, report says

Written by Taipei Times

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The White House postponed a meeting between the Dalai Lama and US President Barack Obama until after Obama's meeting with Chinese leader Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) next month, the Washington Post reported yesterday.

The Post said it would be the first time since 1991 that the Tibetan spiritual leader will visit Washington and not meet the US president. He has visited Washington 10 times over that time span.

Citing unnamed government officials, diplomats and other sources, the report said the move appeared to be aimed at improving ties with China and softening criticism of its human rights abuses and financial policies.

Before visiting China in February, US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said advocacy for human rights could not "interfere with the global economic crisis, the global climate-change crisis and the security crisis."

Human rights advocates criticized her for the statement.

PUBLIC MEETING

During the Dalai Lama's last visit in 2007, former US president George W. Bush met him publicly at the Capitol to award him the Congressional Gold Medal, Congress' highest civilian award.

Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, an inveterate traveler at age 74, was set to arrive in the US capital after two weeks of touring around North America that featured spiritual teachings and an appearance with fellow Nobel laureates.

China has been ramping up pressure on other nations not to receive the Nobel Peace Prize winner, who prefers to describe himself as a simple Buddhist monk.

Explaining the reluctance to meet the Dalai Lama now, US officials told Tibetan representatives that they wanted to work with China on critical issues, including nuclear weapons proliferation in North Korea and Iran, the Post reported.

Activists said they expected a meeting to take place by the end of the year and expressed hopes Obama would raise the question of Tibet in China.

MESSAGE

Some Tibet supporters are nevertheless fuming.

"What would a Buddhist monk or Buddhist nun in Drapchi prison think when he heard that President Obama, the president of the United States, is not going to meet with the Dalai

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Lama?" asked Frank Wolf, a Republican congressman and outspoken critic of China's human rights record. "It's against the law to even have a picture of the Dalai Lama. I can almost hear the words of the Chinese guards saying to them that nobody cares about you in the United States."

Tibetan prime minister-in-exile Samdhong Rinpoche accused the US and other Western nations of "appeasement" toward China as its economic weight grows.

Obama, who met with the Dalai Lama when he was a US senator, has been seeking a broader relationship with China, which is the biggest holder of the ballooning US debt.

In Washington, the Dalai Lama will see congressional leaders including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a longstanding supporter of the Tibetan cause.

He also plans to present an award to a group of Chinese who have tried to build bridges with Tibetans. Organizers declined to identify the honorees beforehand, fearing it could put them at personal risk.

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