

Dalai Lama to visit White House: US official

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The US risked inflaming a row on multiple fronts with China on Thursday, saying the Dalai Lama would visit the White House this month despite Beijing's fierce protests.

But as tensions built over US President Barack Obama's planned welcome for Tibet's spiritual leader, officials sought to douse a running row with Beijing, saying the two sides had common interests despite mounting disagreements.

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs was pressed by reporters to name the date when the Dalai Lama would make his long-expected White House visit.

"He will be here later this month," Gibbs said, but could not be more precise, adding that he did not know if the Dalai Lama would be granted the potent symbolism of an Oval Office visit with media availability.

US presidents have sometimes used a diplomatic tactic known as a "drop by" to see leaders or dignitaries likely to anger or embarrass key foreign powers, fitting in a visit in between scheduled talks between the visitor and another top official.

As China mounts fierce advance protests against the visit, Gibbs said Obama had informed Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) when they met in Beijing in November that he would go ahead with the meeting.

Obama had declined to meet the Dalai Lama, who was in the US late last year, before going to China, in an apparent bid to get his ties with Beijing off on the right foot.

The Chinese government on Wednesday said it "resolutely opposes" the Dalai Lama's visit to the US his meeting any US leaders.

"We urge the US side to clearly recognize the high sensitivity of the Tibet issue and handle related issues carefully and appropriately to avoid causing more harm to Sino-US ties," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu (马照旭) said.

The Dalai Lama will visit Washington starting on Feb. 17, according to his office in India where the monk fled into exile in 1959.

The Dalai Lama said he was seeking greater rights for Tibetans under Chinese rule, but Beijing accuses him of separatism.

The US says it regards Tibet as part of China, but accuses Beijing of serious human rights abuses in the region.

Gibbs also sought to downplay the current back-and-forth between Beijing and Washington, adding that all the issues being aired publicly had been talked over in private between the two sides.

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“There will be issues that we will disagree on, and we will disagree on them both in private and in public,” Gibbs said. “We envision this relationship as one where we can work together on issues of mutual concern. We’ve worked together on stabilizing the world economy. We’ve worked together on issues of proliferation, particularly around North Korea.”

David Shear, a State Department official who works on China, said the US would “regret” such reprisals, but noted that Beijing had not yet followed through on its threats.

“The Chinese reaction has been within expected parameters,” Shear said.

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