

International

Biden and Xi planning 'virtual bilateral' meeting by year-end

Xi unlikely to attend the upcoming G20 gathering of leaders in Rome

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping are planning to meet by video link before the end of the year, a senior US official said Wednesday. There is an "agreement in principle" for the "virtual bilateral," the official told reporters on condition of anonymity.

"The president said how nice it would be to see Xi which he has not done for some years," the official said. "We would expect them to have the ability to see one another, even if only virtually." The official cited news reports that Xi will not attend the upcoming G20 gathering of leaders in Rome, which would have been a natural place for Biden to arrange a bilateral. The virtual meeting was announced after US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met in Zurich with China's top diplomat, Yang Jiechi. The senior official said those talks lasted six hours. During that meeting Yang called for the two countries to work together, according to Chinese state-run news agency Xinhua. "When China and the United States cooperate, the two countries and the world will benefit; when China and the United States are in confrontation, the two countries and the world will suffer seriously," he said, according to the Xinhua report.

He said that Beijing "attaches importance to the positive remarks on China-US relations" made by Biden recently. Sullivan's trip continues an uptick in contact between Beijing and Washington, as Biden argues for establishing "guardrails" for the growing contest between the two powers.

Tension is rising over China's aggressive posture toward Taiwan, the US decision to sell nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, trade disputes and human rights violations against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Yang reiterated China's position on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang and others to Sullivan, and urged the US to "stop using the above issues to interfere in China's internal affairs," Xinhua said. On Monday, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said she would soon be talking to her Chinese counterpart, as a massive trade dispute rumbles on with no end in sight. After the Zurich meeting, Sullivan is due to visit Brussels and Paris, where he will also "debrief his meeting with Director Yang to our European allies and partners," the White House said. Biden, who has known Xi for years, has held two phone calls with the Chinese leader since becoming president. The second, lasting 90 minutes, took place last month. —AFP



WASHINGTON: This file combination of pictures shows US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping. —AFP

China to kick off UN biodiversity summit, virtually

PARIS: China will on Monday launch a crucial biodiversity summit to build political momentum to halt and even reverse the destruction of nature by man. As the human population climbs toward nine billion by mid-century, animals are being crowded, eaten, snared, poisoned, poached, hawked and hunted out of existence.

Forests have been burned to the ground to grow commercial crops, and ecosystems that sustain life on the planet ravaged. The virtual opening of the COP15 summit will transfer leadership from Egypt, which presided over the last gathering in 2018, to China.

During the talks, Beijing will orchestrate high-level online meetings with ministers from scores of countries in a drive to build political momentum. China-by far the world's biggest emitter of carbon pollution that drives global warming and harms the environment—will also issue a "Kunming Declaration" that will set the tone for its leadership, observers say.

"This declaration, we hope, will further underline and recognize the importance of biodiversity for human health," said Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, executive secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a treaty ratified by 195 countries and the European Union.

"It will also recognize the importance of mainstreaming biodiversity in decision-making and will serve also as a tool to create the political momentum," she said. Since gathering in person in Rome last year, delegates have negotiated across cyberspace.

Next week's online meet will be followed by in-person talks in Kunming from April 25 to May 8, with an intermediate session, also face-to-face, in Geneva in January. The November COP26 climate summit in Glasgow, meanwhile, will seek to tame the increasingly devastating effects of global warming. —AFP

French senator calls Taiwan a 'country' in visit China protests

TAIPEI: The head of a French delegation of senators yesterday called Taiwan a "country" during a visit to Taipei, risking fury from China which has strongly protested against the trip. Alain Richard, a former defense minister, arrived on Wednesday for a five-day visit despite repeated warnings from the Chinese embassy in Paris.

In a speech after he was conferred a top medal of honour by President Tsai Ing-wen, Richard said Taiwan's de facto embassy in Paris has been doing "a very good job in representing your country". France, like most countries, officially recognizes China which claims self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory. Beijing tries to keep the island isolated on the world stage and balks at the use of the name Taiwan or any reference to it as a country.

It has ramped up pressure on Tsai's government since her 2016 election win and has aggressively tried to dissuade politicians from visiting in recent years. The Chinese embassy in Paris warned that the visit would damage the interests of China, Chinese-French relations and "the image of France", in comments on its website. Beijing's ambassador wrote a letter to Richard in February, saying the visit would "clearly violate the one-China principle and send the wrong signal to pro-independence forces in Taiwan". Taiwan's foreign ministry has hailed the trip as "symbolizing the insistence of Taiwan and France, as democratic partners, in upholding free and democratic values".

"We are very moved that Senator Richard is undaunted by the pressure... to make his third visit to Taiwan," Tsai said yesterday. She called a resolution Richard proposed in support of Taiwan's international participation, passed by the French senate in May, a "milestone" in relations. Richard chairs the French senate's Taiwan Friendship



TAIPEI: Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen (right) greets French Senator Alain Richard (left) at the Presidential Office in Taipei yesterday. —AFP

Group and visited the island in 2015 and 2018.

Taipei has accused China of using "wolf warrior" diplomacy to try and scupper trips by foreign politicians. "Wolf warrior" is a label given to China's more aggressive posturing under President Xi Jinping that has been embraced by many Chinese diplomats. Last year, Beijing called a visit to Taiwan by the president of the Czech Senate, Milos Vystrcil, a "provocation" and vowed he would "pay a high price". Taiwan's defense minister said Wednesday that military tensions between the island and China are at their highest in four decades, after around 150 Chinese warplanes—a record number—made incursions into Taiwan's air defense zone in recent days. —AFP