

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Vice President Biden to Meet with High-Ranking Chinese Officials in Beijing

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr. | Staff Writer

Washington — Vice President Biden flew to Beijing August 17 for a five-day official visit as the guest of Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping and was greeted by a host of officials led by Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi.

Biden's first stop in Beijing was to watch the Georgetown University men's basketball team take on a team from Shanxi province in a "Friendship Match" at the Olympic Sports Center Gymnasium. Biden had promised Georgetown fans that he would take in a game while visiting Beijing and Chengdu. The gymnasium complex is part of the massive sports facilities that were built by the Chinese for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing and surrounding areas.

Georgetown University is a Roman Catholic college located in Washington. Biden is an avid basketball fan, and after arriving he took a front row seat behind the Georgetown bench and was cheered by fans who had traveled to China with the team, according to a White House press pool report.

Biden was sitting with U.S. Ambassador Gary Locke, the first Chinese American to hold the post of U.S. ambassador to China. Locke, himself, arrived only last week in Beijing and presented his diplomatic credentials to Chinese President Hu Jintao on August 16.

White House officials said in advance of the trip that Biden will discuss Northeast Asian security issues and economic and commercial relations between the two countries during his visit. He also will use the visit to meet with the future leaders of China, the White House officials said. The trip is part of a series of high-level visits between U.S. and Chinese officials agreed to by President Obama and President Hu when they met in Washington January 19 during a state visit.

Chinese officials have been monitoring quite closely economic events in the United States and the debate in the Congress recently on raising the U.S. debt limit. China holds \$1.17 trillion in U.S. Treasury securities.

Locke created a bit of excitement even before arriving in Beijing when he was photographed buying coffee at the Seattle-Tacoma Washington airport while wearing a black backpack as he was en route to China with his family. The photograph has been posted to the Internet and generated considerable interest in China. China Daily, an English-language newspaper, ran a commentary on relations with the United States and said in the headline that "Backpack Makes a Good Impression." According to press reports,

the Chinese have regarded Locke carrying his own backpack and buying his own coffee as a significant sign of humility for an official from a country as large as the United States, something not as common among senior Chinese officials.

AIRPORT ARRIVAL

There was a light rain falling at Beijing International Airport for Biden's arrival ceremony, which included an 18-member Chinese military honor guard. The official party included Yang, Assistant Foreign Minister Zhang Kunsheng, Ambassador to the United States Zhang Yesui and U.S. Ambassador Locke.

The official welcome ceremony will be held on August 18 at the Great Hall of the People adjacent to Tiananmen Square and the ancient Imperial City. Biden will meet with Vice President Xi after the welcoming ceremony, and both leaders will meet briefly with reporters.

Later in the day, Biden will meet with the National People's Congress Chairman Wu Bangguo at the Great Hall, according to the White House. That evening Biden will attend a banquet dinner hosted by Xi.

Biden will deliver a major policy speech on U.S.-China relations at Chengdu's Sichuan University on August 21. Following his speech, Biden will meet with senior provincial officials from Sichuan. He will then travel to Dujiangyan, a city in Sichuan province that was severely damaged in the May 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, according to the White House.

Biden and Xi will meet with students at the rebuilt Qingchengshan High School.

After the visit to Chengdu, Biden travels to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, and then to Tokyo and Sendai in Japan.

The vice president's trip follows closely on Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's recent travel to meetings with foreign ministers at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Lower Mekong Initiative and the East Asia Summit in Bali, Indonesia. Clinton also delivered a major U.S. economic policy speech in Hong Kong on July 25, and then held meetings with State Councilor Dai Bingguo in the southern city of Shenzhen.

In Hong Kong, Clinton told Asian business executives that the most urgent task facing the United States and its Asian allies and trading partners is realigning their economies in the wake of the 2007-2009 global financial crisis. That means pursuing a balanced strategy for global economic growth, Clinton said in the July 25 speech. It is an approach that has been embraced by President Obama and Chinese President Hu, and is promoted by the Group

of 20 advanced economies.

Obama will host the 19th annual meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Honolulu on November 12-13, where it is likely that he will meet with Hu. And they will meet later during the annual ASEAN Summit in Bali, November 17-19, and at the East Asia Summit after the ASEAN meeting.

African Teachers Eager to Return to Classroom After U.S. Training

By Louise Fenner | Staff Writer

Baltimore – Four African teachers of English are bringing new strategies to the classroom after completing a training program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State.

Jean-Baptiste Mohamadou Bassirou Sanfo, a teacher and junior high school principal in Burkina Faso, said he plans to conduct workshops on teaching English in large classes, which are common in his country.

“Some students are visual learners; they need to see a picture, for instance,” he said. “There are some who are oral learners. ... We as teachers need to consider these preferences in our lesson plans.”

Sanfo and teachers from Cape Verde, Namibia and Senegal were among 26 educators from around the world selected for a three-week professional development program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, (UMBC) in the summer of 2011 after completing online courses in their own countries on English teaching methods.

“In Burkina Faso, we consider the teacher as the center, the one who has the knowledge and is trying to share or pour that knowledge into the students,” Sanfo said. “However, the students matter too.” He encourages teachers to seek feedback from their classes and adapt different strategies “to reach all the students.”

The online training and UMBC program were financed through the State Department’s E-Teacher Scholarship Program. About 650 teachers from 100 countries took the graduate-level online courses through UMBC and the University of Oregon during the 2010-2011 academic year.

Each of the participants in the Baltimore program gave a presentation about teacher training projects to carry out back home.

Rewai Makamani, a lecturer at the Polytechnic of Namibia, said he will be training teachers at his school to implement a new curriculum geared to academics,

scientists and business people who need to learn specific English terms associated with their disciplines.

His online English-teaching course was “an eye-opener and a confidence booster,” Makamani said. He came to believe that teachers must shift from “lecturer-student mode” to becoming facilitators or collaborators with students. “It’s not enough to just present terminology,” he said.

Makamani’s workshop for teachers definitely won’t be a top-down class, he said. “They will have to make some contributions themselves.”

Elsa de Jesus Furtado, a secondary school teacher in Cape Verde, said: “The impact of this training was enormous. I feel I am a different teacher now. I feel much more empowered.”

She said she gained ideas on how to “teach without teaching – letting your learners be creative, engaged and involved” through student-centered activities. Furtado plans to show other Cape Verdean English teachers these techniques.

On the last day of the Baltimore program, Ndeye Bineta Mbodi of Senegal was nervous about her presentation. She didn’t need to be. When it was over, she received a congratulatory phone call from the office of Moussa Sakho, Senegal’s minister of technical education and vocational training, who had watched it online. (The presentations were streamed online to other E-Teacher alumni worldwide.)

“If I compare what I was doing before the [online] course and what I am doing now, I ask myself, ‘How could I teach this before?’” said Mbodi, who teaches English at a secondary school and in the medical department of Thies University. “We should not start with assumptions, but that’s exactly what I was doing.”

Mbodi said she used to think that for medical students learning English, “whatever is related to health care will interest them. And that is not what is really happening. Their needs are not just reading texts and some English words. They need to perform the tasks.”

Now she will have students complete projects such as writing a first-aid pamphlet, Mbodi said. She will pass along these techniques in a series of workshops for English teachers.

Mbodi recently applied to teach a class in English at a local company. “I designed the curriculum exactly the way I was taught at the University of Oregon [online course]. There were many other experienced teachers who applied too, but I got it, thanks to that course.”

Fact Sheet: Religious Freedom and National Security

U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Office of
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Fact Sheet

Religious Freedom and National Security

"Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together." --President Barack Obama, Cairo 2009

In a world where approximately 85 percent of people have a religious belief, the suppression of religious freedom and expression can lead to violence and extremism. An open marketplace of ideas is the best way to promote religious freedom and moderation.

1) Countries that permit religious freedom and encourage open dialogue are less likely to propagate extremism. When countries prevent a free religious discourse—often for purported national security concerns—shunned religious groups tend to create their own insular, and often extremist, narratives. Youth are especially susceptible to these narratives, in particular when they are unfamiliar with or unaware of the alternatives available to them.

2) There is a strong correlation between government-sanctioned persecution and impunity and civil strife. In countries where governments place legal restrictions on religious freedom and limit the activities of "heretical" religious perspectives, these actions promote a societal belief that violence against these marginalized groups is not only permitted by society, but legitimized by law.

There is no panacea for religiously motivated strife and violence. However, advancing religious freedom can help ease religious and political conflict. Societies that recognize the strength in diversity and embrace the free exchange of ideas are safer and more stable. Accordingly, our national security strategy must include promoting respect for religious pluralism in society.

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