

Burma will be on top of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's agenda during her sixth Asian trip when she meets leaders of Japan, China, Cambodia, Vietnam, New Zealand and Australia during the next two weeks, said a top US official. He said the US is focused on the Nov. 7 election in Burma

"I expect that Burma will come up in all of our sessions," said Kurk Campbell, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs told reporters. "And clearly, we are highly focused on the upcoming election and other potential steps inside the country, including the possible release of Aung San Suu Kyi."

"I think you can expect to see statements and interactions from the US side, both from the Secretary of State and obviously from the upcoming trip of the president of the United States to Asia as a whole," Campbell said.

Soon after the US mid-term election, US President Barack Obama will travel to India, Indonesia, South Korea and Japan on a 10-day trip, during which the situation in Burma is expected to be one of the major topics of discussions.

Campbell is the Obama administration's point man for talks with the Burmese military regime. He has had two rounds of unproductive talks with the junta so far. The US and the rest of the international community have said that the Burmese elections lack legitimacy.

Earlier in the day, Clinton expressed her condolences on the loss of life in Burma caused by Cyclone Giri. "On behalf of President Obama and the people of the United States, I offer our condolences on the loss of life and damage caused in Burma's Rakhine State," she said in a statement.

"The US Mission in Rangoon has offered immediate disaster relief assistance, and we will offer additional assistance as needed. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Burmese people and all those affected by this tragedy," Clinton said.

State Department spokesman P. J. Crowley said he has no information yet if the aid offer has been accepted by the Burmese regime.

“The last time that Burma suffered a major natural disaster, the US offered assistance, and eventually, Burma accepted that assistance. We’ve made the same offer once again, depending on the impact of the cyclone,” Crowley said.

Clinton Heads to Asia to Assure China's Neighbors

By MATTHEW LEE / AP WRITER

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is heading for Asia and the Pacific to cement ties with some of Beijing's nervous neighbors, part of the Obama administration's efforts to counter China's increasingly assertive stance in its backyard.

Clinton leaves Wednesday on a two-week, seven-nation tour designed in part to allay regional concerns that as China's power rises, Washington is retreating from its traditional role as the dominant Pacific Rim power.

Clinton begins in Hawaii, where she'll see top officers from the US Pacific Command and Japan's new foreign minister to discuss regional security before heading to Vietnam. Washington's relations with Hanoi have warmed in recent years as China's power in the region has grown.

She will meet briefly with Chinese State Councilor Dai Bingguo on Saturday on China's Hainan Island — a last-minute addition to the itinerary announced on the eve of her departure from Washington.

Hainan is a powerful symbol of Chinese military might, hosting an array of intelligence and espionage facilities of the People's Liberation Army and Chinese naval ports.

It was also the place an American spy plane was forced to land in 2001 after it collided with a Chinese fighter jet. The 24 crew members were held for 11 days until President George W. Bush's administration apologized.

More recently, disputes over islands between China, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and other Southeast Asian nations have led to a rise in maritime tensions with the US.

Clinton and Defense Secretary Robert Gates both raised China's hackles on their recent trips to Vietnam by proclaiming that a resolution to those disputes is in the US national interest.

Washington's efforts to persuade China to revise its currency policy, sharp differences over Tibet, human rights and climate change have further divided the two countries.

At the same time, the Obama administration is trying to persuade Beijing to strengthen its support for sanctions against Iran and North Korea. Washington also wants to ensure that a state visit to the US by Chinese President Hu Jintao in early 2011 is a success.

"We all understand the stakes involved and the importance for a positive, constructive and, frankly, a relationship with a degree of confidence between the United States and China going forward," said Kurt Campbell, the top US diplomat for East Asia and the Pacific.

From Hainan, Clinton travels to Cambodia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Australia.

In Cambodia on Sunday, she plans to tour the world-famous 12th-century Angkor Wat temple complex. On Monday, she plans to meet government officials and civic leaders in the capital of Phnom Penh, and to press human rights and development issues.

US-Cambodian relations have been strained for some time, including past disagreements over the composition of a special court that is now trying leaders of the Khmer Rouge on genocide charges related to their 1975-79 rule.

The Cambodian government also is seeking forgiveness from the US of about \$445 million in Vietnam War-era debt. But Washington has balked, arguing the country has the means to repay the low-interest loans.

Clinton on Tuesday will meet Malaysian leaders in Kuala Lumpur, where she seeks expanded help in intercepting illegal weapons shipments from North Korea. She is also expected to seek support from the mostly Muslim nation for US-sponsored Mideast peace efforts and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

On Wednesday, she is slated to visit Papua New Guinea, where she is expected to discuss women's rights and environmental protection. The US is also expected to urge the impoverished country's leaders to use responsibly an expected windfall from huge oil discoveries.

Clinton then moves to New Zealand in the latest US-bid to repair the damage done after the country refused to harbor American nuclear-powered submarines.

She will have talks in the capital of Wellington before traveling to the southern city of Christchurch, which the US uses as a staging point for supply flights to its Antarctic research bases.

From New Zealand, Clinton heads on Saturday, Nov. 6, to Australia, a stalwart American ally, where she and Gates will join an annual meeting of US and Australian foreign and defense ministers.

Her last stop is American Samoa on Monday, Nov. 8, where she will hold talks with island leaders on her way back to Washington.

Clinton's Asia trip, her sixth as President Barack Obama's secretary of state, overlaps partially with Obama's own trip to the continent.

During his trip, Obama will visit India and Indonesia and attend two major international conferences in Japan and South Korea.