



GETTING INTO CHARACTER

A cosplay participant taking a selfie at the Ani-Com and Games exhibition in Hong Kong yesterday. AP PIC

XI: DON'T PLAY WITH FIRE

Chinese president warns US over Taiwan in two-hour call with Biden

WASHINGTON/BEIJING

CHINESE leader Xi Jinping warned against playing with fire over Taiwan in a two-hour call with United States President Joe Biden on Thursday, highlighting Beijing's concerns about a possible visit to the Chinese-claimed island by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"Those who play with fire will

perish by it," China's Foreign Ministry quoted Xi as telling Biden in their fifth call as leaders.

"It is hoped that the US will be clear-eyed about this."

Xi said Washington should abide by the "one-China principle" and stressed that China firmly opposes Taiwanese independence and outside interference.

Biden told Xi US policy on Taiwan had not changed and that Washington strongly opposes unilateral efforts to change the status quo or undermine peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, the White House said.

Following the call, Taiwan thanked Biden for his support and said it would continue to deepen its security partnership

with the US, the Foreign Ministry said in a statement yesterday.

The White House said the long-scheduled call was part of the administration's efforts to deepen lines of communication with China and "responsibly manage our differences".

It has been particularly anxious to lower the temperature on Taiwan.

A visit by the House speaker would be a dramatic, though not unprecedented, show of US support for the island, and some analysts worry such a move at a time of fraught US ties with Beijing could spur a major crisis and even unintended clashes.

Scott Kennedy, a China analyst at Washington's Centre for Strategic and International Studies,

said leader-level contacts were essential to preventing this.

"One hopes they've done enough to avoid a collision in the near term, but it's clear there needs to be much more frequent and in-depth communication," he said.

A senior US official said Biden and Xi had discussed the possibility of holding a first face-to-face meeting as leaders and directed their teams to look into this.

Biden stressed the importance of maintaining lines of communication on Taiwan and the two also discussed areas where there was the potential to expand cooperation, including climate change, health security and counter-narcotics, the official said. **Reuters**