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CHINA

A tide of negative publicity marks the eve of President Xi's first state visit to the US

China's President Xi Jinping is about to embark on his first state visit to the United States which many American media pundits have already branded as a futile public relations exercise. Some Republican politicians and presidential hopefuls have even suggested that the visit should be cancelled on account of its unlikelihood to stop what they describe as China's foul play.

Such idea, of course, hasn't entered the mind of President Obama who, as recently as last July, rang personally the Chinese President to finalize the arrangements for the visit.

However, even if the visit was cancelled, President Xi would still go to New York to address the 70th anniversary session of the United Nations on September 28. It will be his first speech to the UN General Assembly and, from his perspective, equally if not more important than his meeting with Obama at the White House.

The UN anniversary comes at a time when the Chinese government is focussed on affirming China's role as a global superpower and its determination to have a larger influence in world affairs. In other words, China, for the first time in its multi-millennial history, thinks of itself as a mainstay of the whole world and not just of East Asia. The enormous parade, staged recently in Beijing to commemorate the end of World

War II, was not only a demonstration of its military power, but also a statement of its self-proclaimed prominence in world history.

This newly emerged international posture of China will surely transpire in President Xi's address to the United Nations and possibly be applauded by the General Assembly while both Beijing and Washington will have a hard time countering the public perception that Sino-American ties have taken a major turn for the worse. Lately tensions have become rife over the South China Sea, cyberespionage (particularly in the wake of an alleged massive hack into the US Office of Personnel Management) and the economy, with China's being accused of manipulating its currency to gain an economic advantage on US businesses.

Moreover, cases of human and civil rights violations in China are being constantly denounced by human rights organizations questioning the credibility of Xi's announced reform programme. China in turn replies that the US, with the largest prison population in the world and police forces killing unarmed African-Americans, including children, is in no position to lecture any other country on the human rights.

As a matter of fact, China has as many complaints over the US internal and external affairs as the US have over China's. However, despite all areas of contentions, the two countries have never been so economically integrated. Two-way trade has reached nearly \$600 billion last year, and the total value of Chinese investments in the United States, once negligible, has passed a staggering \$54 billion, with considerable room to grow. Yet amid this economic integration, security tensions, instead of abating, have escalated. It is a situation that is of no benefit to either countries, not to mention the risks it also poses to the rest of the world. Hence it is to be hoped that, undeterred by their respective grievances, both presidents will have enough political wisdom to ensure that the Washington summit will not fail.